The Self-Efficacy Of First-Generation College Students

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Dawn D. Jenkins
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This dissertation titled
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by

DAWN D. JENKINS

has been approved for
the Department of Counseling and Higher Education
and the College of Education by

________________________________________

Dana H. Levitt
Associate Professor of Counseling and Higher Education

________________________________________

Renée A. Middleton
Dean, College of Education
ABSTRACT

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This qualitative research explored the experiences of first-generation college students. This study sought to determine how self-efficacy affects the level of academic and social success of first-generation college students, as well as learn how first-generation college students defined personal success. Ten traditional-aged undergraduate students at Ohio University, a predominantly White institution, were interviewed. A demographic questionnaire gathered information regarding students’ backgrounds, academic standing, work/family commitments, financial resources and parent’s level of education. The data analysis revealed three emergent themes: family, transitional issues, and success. Results indicated that FGC students’ higher levels of self-efficacy contributed to their academic success. Other factors, such as family expectations and support, and first-year transitional issues were also found to be contributing factors.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Dana H. Levitt

Associate Professor of Counseling and Higher Education
THIS DISSERTATION IS DEDICATED

IN LOVING MEMORY

OF

MY GRANDFATHER

DAN. E. JENKINS, SR.

AND

MY FATHER

DAN E. JENKINS, JR.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

First-generation college (FGC) students are those enrolled in a college or university and are from a family in which neither parents nor guardians have earned a baccalaureate degree (Choy, 2001) FGC students represent a unique population with distinct characteristics, goals, motivation and aspirations (Ayala & Striplen, 2002). Unlike the typical student, FGC students often must deal with the discouraging and sometimes intimidating challenges associated with belonging to a low-income family. However, with adequate support these disadvantaged students are able to meet those challenges. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2005) research on FGC students in postsecondary education, between 1992 and 2000, 22% of those enrolling in postsecondary education were FGC students.

Most students from low-income families, especially those who are also FGC students, are in need of additional services. In comparison to their peers, FGC students tend to have a significant disadvantage with respect to basic knowledge about and access to information about postsecondary education (e.g., cost, application process, and financial aid procedures), level of family income and support (e.g., they typically receive little or no encouragement at home), educational degree expectations and plans, and academic preparation in high school (Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Kojaku & Nunez, 1998; Pratt & Skaggs, 1989; Stage & Hossler, 1989; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). This lack of preparation can be attributed to their parents’ lack of knowledge as it pertains to factors that promote academic success. Furthermore, unlike their peers,
academic success is typically not a top priority in the families of those who are low-income and FGC students. Such students require special services that are seldom provided by most counselors. These special services may include, but are not limited to, assistance with selecting college courses, completing financial aid applications, tutoring, training in test taking and study skills, as well as learning how to balance school and work.

*Background of Study*

Unlike traditional students, nontraditional FGC students also have multiple roles in which they operate because they often have family and academic responsibilities (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). “Non-traditional students have multiple definitions and include adults, those of multiethnic backgrounds, first generation college students and, among others, those from low-economic backgrounds” (Miller & Mei-Yan Lu, 2003, p.165). An example of this would be a female FGC non-traditional student who has the demands of being a student, a parent, and an employee trying to maintain her familial relationships while establishing relationships that contribute to her educational experience as well. This results in the manifestation of multiple identity issues (Rendon, 1992). Whereas traditional non-FGC students may take parental guidance and knowledge for granted, FGC students do not have the luxury of having their parents’ college experiences to guide them throughout their pursuit of higher education. Instead, FGC students learn through trial and error how to prepare for college, how to manage the academic and social culture of college, and how to discover what is expected of them in the process (Casey, 2005; Orbe, 2004; Riehl, 1994). Consequently students, primarily
those who are FGC students, who come from environments in which education is not valued or where it is unfamiliar, are perceived as being at a disadvantage. However, based on my own personal experience, despite the perceived disadvantage FGC students do indeed learn from their parents’ experiences. FGC parents do not have “college” experiences; instead they have “real life” experiences to share as a result of their lack of education. For example, the hard work, low income and lack of fulfillment that many FGC students see in their parents can potentially be an experience that causes an FGC student to strive for more out of life. Hence, in a situation of this nature if an FGC student obtained a college education he or she would have an opportunity to surpass parents (i.e., gaining financial stability, increased work satisfaction and having to work less).

As students begin their developmental journeys to adulthood, there is often much uncertainty and ambiguity. Although not all, most FGC students are confronted with various challenges when they enter college. Research shows that FGC students typically do not have the same sources of support as non-FGC students tend to have throughout their college experience (Billson & Terry, 1982; Naumann, Bandalos & Gutkin, 2003; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella & Nora, 1996; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). For example, FGC students often feel like outsiders at school and at home because they concurrently live in two significantly different environments (i.e., home and school). Although it cannot be assumed, it is quite possible the marginalization and isolation experienced by FGC students may be in part due to the cultural and socioeconomic differences that exist within these two environments. This would be particularly true for an underrepresented FGC student who chooses to attend a predominantly White
institution. For instance, if a student is not made to feel welcomed and nurtured while in college he or she is more likely to be marginalized and isolated. Research on college attrition and college satisfaction (Billson & Terry, 1982; Fischer, 2007; Pratt & Skaggs, 1989; Richardson & Skinner 1992) has shown that discrimination exists on college campuses and within the classrooms. For example, some professors have been reported as having lower academic expectations of underrepresented FGC students (Feagin, Vera & Imani, 1996; Richardson & Skinner 1992). Consequently, those students who are either exposed to discrimination or not satisfied with the social and emotional environment of the college are more likely to leave.

An FGC student often has a dependence or sense of self and truth that depends upon whatever or whomever has supported and most impacted the individual’s life. These college students’ support systems consist of, but are not limited to, family, friends and significant others. In addition to the FGC student’s support system, one must also consider the FGC student’s salient and multiple identities (i.e., gender, race and class). In 1963, Erickson defined identity as “the ability to experience one’s self as something that has continuity and sameness, and to act accordingly” (p. 42). While enrolled in college, FGC students are expected to continue functioning within their multiple identities at home, school and work.

Research shows that FGC students, in comparison to their peers, tend to select the college they will attend based on location (proximity to home) and financial aid (MacDermott, Conn, & Owen, 1987), enter college with lower aspirations, are more likely to doubt their academic abilities, have lower standardized test scores (Riehl, 1994),
decide to attend college later (Fallon, 1997) and experience more difficulties adjusting to college life (Choy, 2001; Thayer, 2000). While enrolled in college, FGC students experience greater difficulty adjusting to college and are not as committed to being students (Orozco, 1999). According to researchers, the difficulty experienced by FGC students may be a result of the lack of family support (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). When considering college as an option, FGC students often become alienated due to their families’ discouragement. Furthermore, this can lead first-generation college students to doubt their academic and motivation potential resulting in low self-efficacy because they think that they are not college material (Stripplin, 1999; Thayer, 2000). When compared to students whose parents had college experiences, very few FGC students participate in student organizations, interact with other students or faculty, or study hard (Billson & Terry, 1982; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Throughout their education FGC students typically do not have the same resources and information as their peers. Therefore, FGC students have a greater need for motivational factors that may boost their self-efficacy and academic achievement.

*Self-Efficacy*

Self-efficacy is an individual’s beliefs in his or her capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to exercise control over task demands (Bandura, 1990). Early studies have shown that one’s self-efficacy beliefs can account for variance in college outcomes (performance and persistence) beyond that which is accounted for by more traditional predictors, such as standardized achievement/aptitude measures (Robbins, Allen, & Casillas, 2006). According to
Bandura (1977), self-efficacy affects one’s activities, effort and persistence. As demonstrated in other studies, the relationship between self-efficacy and success can be measured from a variety of multiple measures of academic self-efficacy to predict multiple academic outcomes. (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Multon, Brown, Lent, 1991).

To accurately predict one’s success, measures of self-efficacy must assess college outcomes beyond the traditional predictors, such as standardized tests and grade point average (GPA). According to Bandura (1986) an individual must experience success in order to maintain or strengthen his or her self-efficacy. The demands placed on FGC students are vast and have significant effects on their capacity to perform similarly with their counterparts. FGC students often do not perceive themselves as being college material. As a result, once they are admitted to college, they have lower first-semester grades, are more likely to drop out of the first semester, and more frequently do not return for their second year (Brooks-Terry, 1988; Riehl, 1994).

Enrolling in college and completing a degree are important milestones for FGC students. Although completion of a college education is important from both the perspective of the individual and society, many potential college students lack the skills or the resources needed to enter college or complete a college degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Many students from disadvantaged backgrounds, in particular, are also from racially or ethnically diverse backgrounds and establish supportive networks within those contexts (Casey, 2005). Even more than academic assistance, FGC students may need help in dissociating the need for support from notions of personal weakness.
Statement of the Problem

Research has shown an increasing rise in the number of FGC students entering postsecondary institutions (Choy, 2001; Horn & Nunez, 2000). However, over time FGC students are more likely to drop out of college than the average student (Ishitani, 2003). When compared to their peers, FGC students differ significantly in their family economic status and support, degree aspirations and expectations, and degree attainment. In order to reverse this trend, this research explores self-efficacy theory and how it relates to the academic and social development of FGC students who go on to earn bachelors degrees. “Although we appear to know much about the FGC students with respect to their academic preparation, transition to postsecondary education, and progress toward degree attainment, surprisingly little is known about their college experiences or their cognitive and psychosocial development during college” (Pascarella, Peerson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004, p.250). The present study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do FGC students define personal success?

2. How does self-efficacy affect the academic and social success of FGC students?

This research explores the challenges, opposition and issues that many FGC students encounter while pursuing an undergraduate degree. The study shows the ways in which FGC students adapt and adjust to the challenges they face as they transition into college. In addition, this research reveals the relationship between motivation, self-efficacy and the level of success that is attained by FGC students. With the guidance of
the participants, success is defined and factors that contribute to the success and increase of self-efficacy among FGC students are discussed.

Significance of the Study

As a growing population in higher education, FGC students represent a unique group with distinct goals, motivations, and limitations (Ayala & Striplen, 2002). The increase in the number of FGC students who choose to attend college demonstrates the significance and necessity for further research pertaining to this population. This study furthers the research on the self-efficacy of traditional age FGC students. This study identifies specific familial and environmental (both social and cultural) experiences that have impacted the cognitive and psychosocial development of traditional age FGC students within the academy. The results of the study can help mental health counselors, specifically college counselors, to understand the anxieties, stressors, cultural, social, and academic challenges that FGC students face as they matriculate through college. In addition, the information revealed through this study can be used to help FGC students to pursue their academic, vocational, personal and professional goals, despite the challenges that they encounter.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on Ohio University undergraduate students who have identified themselves as the first person in their family to earn a bachelors degree (i.e., first-generation college students). Consequently, students were self-selected as prospective participants. Given the diversity of ages among FGC students, this study selected participants who are traditional age (18-24 years old) FGC students enrolled at
Ohio University on the Athens campus at the time of the study. Since this study is not inclusive of FGC students who attend Ohio University branch campuses, the participant pool is also a delimitation. Although a significant proportion of FGC students may also be economically disadvantaged, this research does not work under the assumption or expectation that participants in the study be low-income. In addition, research regarding FGC student has shown that most non-traditional FGC students tend to initially attend 2-year institutions as opposed to 4-year institutions; therefore, it is possible that some of the participants would also be transfer students. This study focuses solely on how the students define success and their perception of their level of self-efficacy.

There are various limitations to this study, such as the sex, ethnicity and socioeconomic status of the participants. Because Ohio University is a predominantly White institution, being a FGC student is probably not a salient aspect of a White student’s identity. Thus a potential limitation could be that most of the participants in this study are students of color and, therefore, not representative of the Ohio University student population. Additionally, because Ohio University is a 4-year institution it is likely that this study primarily reports the opinions and perceptions of traditional age students. Participation in this study is voluntary. Factors such as age, campus and family involvement were also taken into consideration.

As an undergraduate student, the researcher was from a low-income family, underrepresented, and a first-generation college student (on her maternal side of the family). The researcher is, therefore, biased in terms of what factors improve and/or impede the success of first-generation college students. In an effort to counteract the
influences of the researcher’s personal bias, during the one-on-one interviews the researcher disclosed her personal connection to the research while conducting relatively unstructured interviews. As a result, the participants may have been able to assume more power over the direction of the conversation.

Organization of the Study

The study is presented and organized in five consecutive chapters. Chapter One consists of an introduction to the literature and research on the relationship between support, self-efficacy and success as it relates to the academic and social development of FGC students. The statement of the problem, significance of the study, research hypothesis, limitations and delimitations of the study, definitions of terms, and organization of the study are also presented. In Chapter Two, a review of the literature relevant to self-efficacy, FGC students, and success is presented. In Chapter Three, the research methodology and instrumentation used in this study are described. Chapter Four consists of a presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the data. In Chapter Five, the results of the study are discussed, including summary, research findings and a presentation of the conclusions. In addition, recommendations for possible future research are suggested.

Definition of Terms

Academic Self-Efficacy

An individual’s confidence in his or her ability to successfully perform academic tasks at a chosen level (Schunk, 1991).
Disadvantaged Students

Students who have limited (financial, educational and social) resources.

Extrinsic Motivation

Motivation that is directed at attaining or avoiding something outside oneself.
(Walker, Greene, & Mansell, 2006)

First Generation College Student (FGC)

A college or university student from a family in which neither parent or guardian
has earned a baccalaureate degree (Choy, 2001).

Intrinsic Motivation

What people will do and activities they will engage in for no reward other than for
their own interest and enjoyment (Malone & Lepper, 1987).

Nontraditional College Student

(1) Adult students who enter or re-enter higher education with a prior
major break in their formal involvement in learning,

(2) Students enrolled in academic studies who represent specific
chronological age categories (25 years and older)

(3) Adult students who enter higher education on the basis of mature life
experience (gained through work, family and/or community
involvement),

(4) Adult students who have completed a higher education program or
degree of studies at an earlier stage and now re-enter for professional
updating or to pursue a second academic area of expertise (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002, p.314).

**Self-Efficacy**

“One’s beliefs in one’s capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to exercise control over task demands” (Bandura, 1990, p.316).

**Social Self-Efficacy**

Social self-efficacy extends the definition of academic self-efficacy to include pro-academic social behaviors, such as asking a professor a question outside of the classroom.

**Social Support**

The process through which help is provided to others (Feldman & Chen, 2000). In this study the researcher focused on the students’ perception of the adequacy of support received from family, friends, and significant others.

**Traditional College Students**

Those who follow the typical educational biographical sequences one passes through on his or her route to higher education (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002, p.314).

**Transitional Issues**

Those factors which directly impact the student’s transition into college (i.e., finances, exposure and preparation, college knowledge, balancing responsibilities, and adaptation).
Underrepresented Students

Refers to minority students of color (i.e. African-Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans) (Kojaku & Nunez 1998; Choy, 2001).
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter looks at FGC students and the degree to which self-efficacy manifests and influences their educational experiences. In order to ensure that FGC students are successful while in college, it is important that they ascertain and master skills such as planning, goal setting, time management, problem-solving and coping to help them become efficacious. However, due to the challenges of being a FGC student, these skills may not be as developed as they are in their peers. Self-efficacy theory speaks to the challenges and experiences that can enhance or impede a student’s overall potential. There appears to be little research on the academic success of FGC students that extends beyond looking at grade point average, test assessments and career interests. This chapter explores some of the transitional and relational issues that FGC students experience in pursuit of postsecondary education and ways in which their self-efficacy positively or negatively influences their academic success and overall experience.

First-Generation College Students

There has been ongoing research about FGC students and the challenges that they encounter. Throughout research there has been a variance in the definition of FGC students. They have been defined as students whose parents have not attended college (Billson & Terry, 1982; Chen, 2005) and as a college or university student from a family where a parent or guardian has attended college but neither one has earned a baccalaureate degree (Choy, 2001). For this researcher’s purposes FGC students are defined as those who come from a family in which neither parent has earned a bachelor’s degree. Despite the inconsistencies in the definition of FGC students, the results of both
prior and present research are consistent. Research has consistently shown that most FGC students are predominantly female, nontraditional, ethnic minorities, from low-income families and speaking a language other than English at home (Bui, 2002; Fallon, 1997; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Orbe, 2004; Rendon, 1992; Ting, 1998). FGC students differ from their peers in their academic and social and environmental experiences, as well as their overall approach to life. The National Center for Educational Statistics (1999) reported 50.2% of FGC students begin their college education at two-year colleges. Additionally, from 1976-2000, Black student enrollment increased 14.9% and Hispanic enrollment increased to 25.4% in degree granting institutions (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002). Over the past ten years nontraditional students accounted for 30%-50% of the undergraduate student population. The grade point averages of FGC students would seem it presage academic difficulties in their college careers. Exploring issues of self-efficacy may shed some light on paths to greater success. FGC students have rare transitional and academic needs that are often overlooked and not addressed at traditional institutions. Consequently, FGC students often find themselves in a state of academic emergency (i.e., struggling to find ways to pay tuition for the current or upcoming academic quarter or semester so that they can remain enrolled, or struggling to raise their grade point average due to their lack of academic preparation).

**FGC Challenges and Disadvantages**

**Academic Challenges**

Unlike their peers, FGC students do not have the advantage of their parents’ college experience to use as a model for college throughout their pursuit of higher
education. FGC students may not have their parents assist them with the preparation for admission into college. In fact, York-Anderson and Bowman (1991) found that FGC students are less likely than non-FGC students to receive support from their family when choosing to attend college. As a result, FGC students typically are left floundering without having a full understanding of all that is required and expected of them to prepare for and excel at a college or university (Vargas, 2004).

In many ways, when compared with their peers, FGC students are academically underprepared for college. For example, they typically do not take college preparatory courses while in high school. In fact, they are often placed in lower-level math and reading courses while in high school. In comparison with their peers, they tend to have lower Standardized Achievement Test (SAT) scores, lower high school grade point averages (Riehl, 1994) and often decide to attend college later in life (Fallon, 1997). Due to their lack of academic preparation, FGC students are less likely to remain enrolled until the completion of their degree. Conversely, Ting’s (1998) research explored low-income FGC students’ potential. She found that those who participate in community service and have a successful leadership experience while in high school are more likely to demonstrate academic success at the college level.

FGC students are inclined to doubt their academic and motivational abilities. Consequently, FGC students are more likely to apply to and enroll in less prominent or colleges, enter with lower aspirations, and to underestimate their academic potential (MacDermott, Conn & Owen, 1987). These difficulties may be a result of their lack of family support (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). Furthermore, when compared to
their peers, it was discovered that very few FGC students participate in student organizations, interact with other students or faculty, or study hard (Billson & Terry, 1982). However, this may be a direct result of the amount of time that FGC students work while also attending classes.

Socioeconomic Challenges

According to the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1998, approximately 27% of high school graduates in 1992 were FGC students. Of these students half were from low-income families and most were African American or Hispanic. Once enrolled in college, these students tend to have greater difficulties adjusting to college life (i.e., working to pay for college and having enough time to still study for classes) and are less committed to their roles as students (Billson & Terry, 1982; MacDermott, Conn & Owen, 1987; Orozco, 1999). It is possible that students’ limited commitment or low academic achievement may result in withdrawal from college. Leaving may result from the amount of time that FGC students allocate to other commitments, such as family and work while enrolled in college. According to Billson and Terry (1982) when compared to their peers, FGC students spend almost twice as much time working part-time or full-time jobs. Due to the low socioeconomic status of FGC students and their families, degree attainment may be seen solely as a means of financial gain and obtaining a good job (Brooks-Terry, 1988).

Social, Cultural and Environmental Challenges

For some FGC students, being the first person in their family to go to college and earn a degree can be a great burden, as well as an accomplishment. On one hand it can be
a stressor because of fear of failing and letting the family down. For example, when a 
traditional FGC student visits home he or she may receive special treatment and attention, 
such as particular meals, monetary gifts, extra attention from relatives and members of 
the community. When FGC students, particularly those who are Latino and African-
American, go to college they may feel as if they are representing their family and their 
home community (Orbe, 2004). For example, for some students, being the first in their 
families to go to college is motivation for them to succeed because their academic 
success has the potential to pave the way for another family member in the future.

Students’ FGC identity carries a different meaning and significance depending on 
the students’ perspective and their background. Orbe (2004) researched multiple 
identities in relation to FGC students. He discovered that students who were 
underrepresented, of a lower socioeconomic status, female and non-traditional were more 
likely to identify with their FGC student identity moreso than other identities. Only 
European American male student participants described their first-generation status as 
nonsalient. Conversely, when these students are on college campuses, their first-
generation identity is revealed at their own discretion. Their FGC status is typically not 
an identifying factor, nor is it a topic of discussion among their peers. Some FGC 
students may view their FGC identity as having a stigma and therefore choose not to 
disclose their FGC status (Orbe, 2004). For example, some students opt not to disclose 
their FGC status for fear that others (within the college environment) will assume that 
college was not important to their family.
While attempting to learn the culture of academia, FGC students are also faced with the challenge of continuously maintaining and functioning in their various identities within their families, homes and the college community (Brooks-Terry, 1988; Orbe, 2004). It is within these settings that FGC students are singled out. They are faced with the challenge of dealing with differing, yet significant, environments of college and home. FGC students often struggle with the variation in expectations and acceptance (or lack thereof) that they receive when at home or college. While at home their FGC identity is prominent among their family, friends and community. Due to their awareness of the students’ identity, a FGC student may occasionally experience strife between self and others, particularly with those in the family and the community who feel threatened or jealous of the students’ academic accomplishments (Orbe, 2004).

Self-Efficacy

Much of the research conducted by Bandura has focused on the self-efficacy of adolescents and students in general. In his and other studies, researchers have identified factors and characteristics that determine levels of self-efficacy. Studies conducted on FGC students have primarily emphasized academic achievement as it relates to one’s academic performance, standardized achievement tests (SAT), grades and career interests. Due to the overlap and similarities in factors of self-efficacy and the challenges of FGC students, this study aims to determine if students’ self-efficacy contributes to the success and potential of FGC students.

Albert Bandura has also done significant work on social learning, which resulted in the emergence of the Social Learning Theory, later known as the Social Cognitive
Theory. Bandura looked at behavior and cognition, suggesting that behaviors were acquired through observation. A further extension, Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, focuses on observational learning (modeling) and self-regulation.

Most research on perceived self-efficacy has focused on the way in which self-efficacy regulates motivation, behaviors, and emotions (Bandura, 1986). Motivation is contingent upon the expected outcome of the actions and goals. A student’s self-efficacy beliefs can either enhance or impair his or her academic and social performance by affecting thoughts, emotions, motivations and selection processes (Bandura, 1989).

While many researchers focus primarily on academic experiences, studies have shown that self-efficacy can reflect a student’s academic potential. Bandura (1997) describes self-efficacy as “the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p.3).

**SELF-EFFICACY THEORY**

Self-efficacy theory views behaviors, physiology, cognitions and situational influences as interacting determinants of one another (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Positive experiences result in increases in self-efficacy whereas negative experiences and past failures contribute to a decrease in self-efficacy. Although the two terms are often used interchangeably, Bandura’s self efficacy theory states that self-efficacy and self-esteem are indeed different (Bandura, 1986). Unlike self-esteem, which relates to one’s self-worth, self-efficacy emphasizes one’s perception of personal capabilities. Bandura (1986) defines two components of self-efficacy: efficacy expectations and outcome expectations. Efficacy expectations are beliefs about one’s capabilities to accomplish specific tasks.
Outcome expectations refer to beliefs about the likelihood that certain behaviors will result in desired outcomes. Outcome expectations partially pertain to aspects of the external environment and are not as adaptable as self-efficacy expectations.

Self-efficacy beliefs determine how one thinks, feels, behaves and motivates oneself. According to Bandura (1994) these self-efficacy beliefs affect one’s cognitive, motivational, affective and selection processes, which influence one’s perception of control over a task.

*Cognitive Processes*

The way one perceives his or her abilities will activate his or her self-efficacy and dictate the goals that he or she sets. During this cognitive process it is critical that a person identifies options, weighs and considers all possible factors, and critically and realistically analyzes one’s potential despite the given circumstance. People with high self-efficacy envision themselves being successful and replay positive thoughts of success in their minds. The application of their analytical skills allows them to meet the challenges and accomplish the task or goal at hand. Those with lower self-efficacy tend to anticipate and focus on the potential pitfalls and failures, an approach which then results in self-doubt. When facing challenges, setbacks and obstacles, individuals with lower self-efficacy lower their aspirations and demonstrate a decrease in their performance quality or give up quickly. In contrast, those with high self-efficacy are more inclined to embrace the challenge and fulfill their goal.
Motivational Processes

The ability to maintain consistency in levels of motivation is a key factor in self-efficacy. Bandura (1994) suggests that motivation is stimulated by one’s thoughts, which then dictate his or her efficacy beliefs. Throughout their education, FGC students typically do not have the same resources and information as their peers. Therefore, they have a greater need for motivational factors that will boost their self-efficacy and academic achievement. According to Orbe (2004), a FGC student's identity can serve as motivation for success. For example, some FGC students are motivated knowing that their pursuit of a degree will increase the likelihood that other family members will go to college. In other instances, especially for those students who belong to an ethnic minority group, their identity may also bring about adjustment difficulties as a result of their minority status on a predominantly White campus. For example, while attending a White college an African-American or Latino student is in an environment where the curriculum, classroom discussions and faculty of color are disproportionate. Consequently, African-American or Latino students finds themselves in a position where they must adapt to White views, norms, and practices (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996).

In order to understand student achievement, one must also understand the motivational concept of self-efficacy. There are several ways in which self-efficacy impacts motivation. It determines the goals individuals set, the effort put forth, their willingness to persevere despite challenges, and their resilience in the face of failures. According to Bandura (1986), when adequate levels of ability and motivation are present, an individual’s self-efficacy may enhance one’s task initiation and persistence. Unless an
individual believes that his or her actions may produce desired results, motivation to act may be low. One’s beliefs may directly impact the individual’s commitment level and willingness to endure despite challenges and adversities encountered. How much time, effort, and energy a person will apply and his or her willingness to complete goals may also be impacted.

Affective Processes

The term affective process refers to the emotional reactions one has when faced with challenges. The implementation of successful past experiences, also known as a mastery experiences, allows one to gain coping skills and acquire beliefs that he or she is capable of controlling situations perceived as a threat or challenge. As a result, the individual may be more likely to establish more realistic judgments about the circumstances and challenges he or she may experience. Coping skills significantly impact the degree of stress and depression that one experiences when faced with adversity. One’s perception of ability to control the stressors, perceived as challenges or threats, and the thoughts associated with them, influence the level of anxiety experienced. Heightened anxiety results when one believes the stress in unmanageable. As a result the individual worries more, places a greater emphasis on threats that are less likely to occur, and lacks the ability to cease thoughts of defeat. Ultimately, a deficiency in this area may lead to avoidant behavior and can cause an outward expression of anxiety, fear or stress and hinder the ability to function effectively. The lack of ability to control stress can also impair one’s immune system, thus putting the person at greater risk of developing infections and diseases.
Low self-efficacy due to the inability to exercise control can lead to depression. Depression manifests as a result of unfulfilled aspirations or when an individual is unable to seek out and cultivate socially satisfying and supportive relationships. Social self-efficacy extends the definition of academic self-efficacy to include pro-academic social behaviors, such as asking a professor a question outside of the classroom. The presence of social self-efficacy provides an outlet for dealing with stress and achieving personal satisfaction. One can learn approaches to dealing with challenging situations. Conversely, a low sense of social efficacy contributes to reoccurrences of depression.

Selection Processes

Selection process examines how people make decisions in their daily lives. Just as people have some control over their daily challenges, personal efficacy beliefs influence the kinds of activities and environments which one selects. These choices shape and refine our interests, competencies and development across the lifespan. Fischer’s (2007) quantitative study shows Hispanic and African American students are likely to be first-generation and low-income. For these students, in particular, their decision to withdraw or stay in college is significantly impacted by the social factor of self-efficacy.

FACTORS IMPACTING SELF-EFFICACY

Self-efficacy refers to an individual’s beliefs or judgment of how capable she or he is of successfully performing specific tasks or behavior. Self-efficacy is contingent not upon one’s skills but rather how one judges his or her ability to perform and execute necessary actions with whatever skills he or she possesses. According to Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (1996) personal, social, and situational factors
including socioeconomic, familial, peers, and self processes can impact students’ self-efficacy and academic performance.

Socioeconomic

Bandura et al. (1996) addressed the influence of socioeconomic status on parents’ efficacy in promoting their children’s educational goals. Their research studied children ages 11-14, and suggests that as parents promote and encourage the child’s education the child may be less likely to experience depression and display unacceptable behavior. This research suggests that career aspirations are developed early. Consequently, the more a parent believes that he or she can influence the child’s academic development, the more the child’s self-efficacy and academic goals may increase. No research is available to date conducted with college students to see if the same is true for them.

However, other researchers have explored reasons why first-generation college students pursue higher education. While comparing FGC students to their peers, Bui (2002) shows that FGC students report they were pursuing higher education to help their family out financially after completing college. FGC students may be highly committed to their families and often have familial and financial demands that infringe upon their ability to focus solely on their academics (Bui, 2002; Schmidt, 2003). Many FGC students finance their college education through external funds, such as work and loans. Fischer’s (2007) most recent research revealed that a higher percentage of African-American and Hispanic students who were also FGC financed a large percentage of their college expenses with external funds. These familial and financial responsibilities can potentially limit the access that FGC students have to four-year colleges and universities.
If so, it is quite possible that these familial and financial responsibilities would take precedence over their education. For some students, being a FGC student can also be a burden and responsibility because “it serves as an important link to others in their family who can build on their collegiate success” (Orbe, 2004, p.137). Although family finances have been shown to be a challenge for FGC students, research is not available determining if and how the lack of financial resources might affect FGC students’ level of self-efficacy.

FGC students are more likely to come from a lower socioeconomic background, to report that they were pursuing higher education to help their family out financially after they complete college, and to worry about financial aid for college (Bui, 2002). Research has shown that for first-generation college students, the motivation to enroll in college is a deliberate attempt to improve their social, economic, and occupational standing in society (Ayala & Striplen, 2002). Consequently, many FGC are working part-time, if not full-time, in order to pay for their college education.

**Familial**

As implied in the previous section on the socioeconomic impact, the initial efficacy experience stems from family. Through peer interactions, typically beginning with one’s siblings, social comparisons begin to have an impact. Although there are variances in families, factors such as family structure, birth order, gender of siblings and family size significantly impact and shape how one compares and judges one's self-efficacy (Bandura et al., 1996). There is a greater tendency for competitiveness between those siblings who are of the same gender and closer age.
Likewise, one’s parent or guardian also impacts one's self-efficacy. The culture and values of FGC students’ home and college environments differ. For example, unless he or she has experienced college it may be difficult for a FGC student's family and friends to understand and support the need to study. Additionally, many cultures promote working cooperatively, whereas academia promotes individuality. Therefore, it is likely that FGC students may experience conflicts which could lead to feelings of isolation.

In addition to the difficulties FGC students face when adjusting to the collegiate environment, their developmental transition into adulthood often brings much uncertainty and ambiguity. Although the desire and pursuit of postsecondary education may be an attainable goal, a quantitative study on FGC students at 4-year institutions reports that FGC students typically feel guilty for pursuing a degree while their families are struggling to survive (Bui, 2002).

**Peers**

Peer factors address how self-efficacy affects social and emotional development through social and emotional situations that can either help or hinder the child’s development (Bandura et al., 1996). As one grows and develops, one's peers outside the family become increasingly important as social comparisons and an awareness of one’s capabilities begin. Peers have numerous roles in one’s self-efficacy. They serve as role models of efficacious behavior, promote social learning, and provide a reference point for self-efficacy appraisal and verification (Bandura, 1997). Academically, students learn and establish their intellectual self-efficacy from their peers. This begins, in part, through their coursework and is reinforced by the instructor’s grading and evaluation of the
student’s academic performance. In these academic situations, students compare and rate one another. The peer comparisons become an open discussion of his or her intellectual abilities or lack thereof among the peers, which influences his or her personal efficacy.

Additionally, peers can influence self-efficacy through instruction by modeling the desired behavior and skills. Bandura (1997) suggests that for students “the more similar they perceive themselves to be in competence to the peer models, the more firmly they believe in their learning efficacy and the higher the intellectual performances they achieve” (p. 234). Peer modeling, when using someone similar to the student, has the potential to increase the student’s academic self-efficacy for the subject, for learning in general and for overall achievement. The observation of his or her success may allow the observing students to feel as if they are also capable of success. However, this same modeling behavior can potentially have an adverse effect if the peer model has already obtained mastery skills and is not shown during the time in which these skills are being acquired and developed (Bandura, 1997).

Lastly, peers can also influence a student’s self-efficacy through interpersonal affiliations. These peers, in part, are responsible for influencing and cultivating the student’s academic and intellectual development. For students who are underrepresented, such as FGC students, peer affiliations may consist of, but are not limited to, individuals such as family acquaintances, faculty members, or members of a student organization in which the FGC student is involved. Fischer’s (2007) research states, “involvement in formal activities on campus contributes not only to greater satisfaction for Black and Hispanic students but also to greater academic success” (p.154). Students’ involvement in
extracurricular activities and their connection with professors and friends, for African-American and Hispanic students in particular, significantly impacts their college satisfaction and retention. Fischer’s (2007) study found that students of all ethnic groups (African-American, Hispanic, Asian and White) who were unable to form friendships in college were more likely to withdraw from college. Results showed all students in the study, with the exception of Whites, were also likely to leave if they lacked adequate connections with professors. For instance, “each one-point increase in satisfaction with college decreased the odds of leaving by 24% for Blacks and 33% for Hispanics” (Fischer, 2007, p. 151).

Based on Bandura’s self-efficacy studies and theory, people’s beliefs in their abilities are better predictors of their behavior and performance than their actual abilities. Further research suggests it is not a student’s ability, but the feedback (positive or negative) that he or she receives that impacts the student’s efficacy beliefs. It could be suggested that the same is true for external motivation. According to Mitchell (1992), college students’ extrinsic motivation more strongly predicts grade point average. Extrinsic motivation is motivation that aims to attain or avoid something outside of oneself (Walker, Greene, & Mansell, 2005). Whereas an intrinsically motivated student may succeed for feelings of personal satisfaction, conversely an extrinsically motivated student’s success is contingent upon an external reward, such as money or a desired grade.
Self Processes

According to DeWitz and Walsh (2002), an individual’s level of self-efficacy can increase or decrease through performance accomplishments (e.g. successful or unsuccessful past performances), vicarious experience (e.g. observing others), social persuasion (e.g. suggestions from self or others), and emotional arousal (e.g. stress, anxiety). Recent studies have shown that those who believe that they can master new situations, despite situational variances, tend to display greater confidence in their ability to succeed in a variety of areas and tasks (Lindley & Borgen, 2002; Nauta, 2004). For example, a student who performs well in a course will be more likely to believe that he or she can be equally, if not more, successful in another course. Conversely, weak efficacy beliefs can contribute to avoidance behavior. Self-efficacy beliefs influence one’s thought processes, motivation, persistence and emotions. As a result, an individual with “weak” self-efficacy would, more often than not, doubt his or her capabilities, be more prone to lack motivation, and shy away from tasks that are perceived to be too difficult. For instance, if a student has not known or observed someone being successful in college, he or she would be less motivated and less inclined to believe in his or her own ability to be successful in college.

Each developmental level differs and presents new challenges and a need for new coping methods. An individual’s belief in his or her ability to cope directly affects the manifestation of stress, anxiety, depression experienced and the level of motivation displayed when they encounter challenging situations. One’s perception of his or her control over the situation and own conscious thoughts significantly affect how one may
deal with the stress. Individuals with high self-efficacy may embrace the challenges and threatening situations they encounter, whereas individuals with low self-efficacy may have an increase in anxiety, demonstrate avoidance behavior, and have a greater tendency to place more emphasis on the potential threats. According to Bandura (1994) the implementation of both coping self-efficacy and thought control efficacy can minimize the anxiety and avoidance behavior. As a result, one can develop a hardy sense of efficacy thus equipping one with the ability to withstand the difficulties and adversities without the outcome resulting in undesirable effects.

*Types of Self-Efficacy*

There are two kinds of self-efficacy: academic and social. When assessing self-efficacy, researchers measure the individual’s confidence in his or her ability to perform a wide range of tasks. Academic self-efficacy testing instruments are usually related to a course or course content. In other instances, researches have assessed students’ confidence and beliefs in their ability to master course material, perform well on course tasks, and attain high grade in a particular course (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Schmidt, 2003).

*Academic Self-Efficacy*

Schunk (1991) defines academic self-efficacy as an individual’s confidence in his or her ability to successfully perform academic tasks at a chosen level. The greater the students’ academic efficacy, the more they may believe they are capable of doing academic work and see themselves as having options. They may make a conscientious effort to be more engaged in their learning experience and be more academically
prepared, which may result in high academic performance, goals and accomplishments (Naumann, Bandalos, & Gutkin, 2003).

Researchers have shown that self-efficacy relates to persistence, tenacity, and achievement in educational settings (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 1981). Pintrich’s (1995) research shows that factors such as finishing homework assignments by deadlines, concentrating on school subjects and studying despite distractions are highly correlated with a student’s first semester grade point average. Based on prior research conducted on FGC students, it has been shown that they have multiple commitments and, therefore, are less likely to commit time to schoolwork thus making them more likely to have a lower grade point average than their peers. In his most recent book, Albert Ellis (2005) stated that traditionally one’s self-esteem has been contingent upon accomplishing personal goals and desires. “Personal goal setting is influenced by self-appraisal of capabilities” (Bandura, 1994, p.4). Research has shown that individuals with high self-efficacy tend to set higher goals, have higher aspirations and are therefore more committed to accomplishing the goals that they have set forth (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez, 1992).

Although most research suggests that one’s grade point average is indicative of one’s self efficacy and potential, based on some of the research conducted on FGC students, this may not be the case. If this were true for them, one might easily assume that a FGC student with a low grade point average also has low self-efficacy. Although one does not perform high academically, it does not mean that he or she is any less capable of doing so. Ting’s (2003) research has shown how psychosocial variables, such
as a successful leadership experience and community service can also significantly predict one’s grade point average. For example, a low-income FGC student who has participated in community service and has had a successful leadership experience while in high school is more likely to demonstrate academic success at the college level.

Social Self-Efficacy

Social self-efficacy extends the definition of academic self-efficacy to include pro-academic social behaviors, such as asking a professor a question outside of the classroom. Research shows that FGC students typically are not as socially integrated as their peers. Fischer’s (2007) quantitative study reported that those who do not find meaningful connections between themselves and the university may be more prone to either failing or withdrawing from the university. For example, Fischer showed an increase in satisfaction may decrease an African-American FGC student’s withdrawal rate by 24% and a Hispanic FGC students’ withdrawal rate by 33%.

The student’s coping skills, management of stressors, and efficacy level may determine whether he or she perceives the situation as a challenge or threat. “Threat occurs when the individual experiences resources as insufficient to meet demands, and challenge occurs when resources are felt to be adequate to demands” (DeWitz & Walsh, 2002, p.57). Resources such as college prep courses in high school, knowledge about and abilities relevant to college, availability of financial support, one’s dispositional characteristics, available support networks of family, peers, faculty or institutional structure all enhance resource perceptions and increase a student’s ability to meet the demands of college. Without resources FGC students may be more inclined to view
college as a threat than as a challenge. FGC students, in particular, are likely to worry about the possibility of academic failure and social embarrassment.

Conclusion

FGC students, low-income students and ethnic minority students are historically underserved. As stated previously, FGC students are a unique population that continues to increase in institutions of higher education (Choy, 2001). It is important to develop a more in depth understanding of this student population and their challenges, as well as their academic and vocational potential so that they can be given an opportunity equal to their non-FGC counterparts. In many instances, FGC students have demonstrated their ability to be academically successful. Likewise, self-efficacy has been proven to significantly and directly relate to academic expectations and academic performance. However, the majority of research that has been conducted on FGC students has been conducted at community colleges. Additionally, research is clear in stating that FGC students are often low-income and ethnic minorities and that there is a consistent growth of this student population; however, there is little to no research that studies the self-efficacy of FGC students and the role it plays in their academic success at a predominantly White, four year institution.

Similarly, much of the prior research on self-efficacy has focused on adolescents and their high school academic experience and career interests. Self-efficacy has also proven to strongly relate to students’ perceptions of their capacity for responding to the demands of college life. As a result, one can presume that a significant determining factor in a FGC student’s success is self-efficacy. With this in mind, it is important that
counselors are aware of the personal, familial, cultural, financial and educational
difficulties experienced by FGC students. With an increased awareness among counselors
and higher education professionals, students may feel supported and understood while in
school, a situation which could increase the retention and degree attainment of FGC
students.

Ultimately, the research in this study seeks to use the theoretical perspective of
self-efficacy to explore the experiences of FGC students and have a significant impact on
the educational and vocational theories and practices of counseling and higher education
professionals.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This research explored the student’s perspective of the external and internal motivational factors that have threatened their self-efficacy and overall level of academic success. The purpose of this study was to advance the research in self-efficacy theory and to increase the knowledge of counselors and higher education professionals as it pertains to FGC students. This research primarily used qualitative methods to examine students’ perceptions of the motivational factors that contribute to their level of self-efficacy and overall level of academic success. In addition, FGC student success was defined by those who participate in the study.

Information was obtained from undergraduate students at Ohio University who self-identified themselves as FGC students. The questions asked of the target population were based on the information gathered in the pilot study. In addition, information gathered in the pilot study aided the researcher in identifying areas and issues that were of particular concern to FGC students and therefore warranted further examination.

This study sought to help mental health counselors and higher education professionals understand the positive unique supports that FGC students bring with them as they matriculate through college. It is hoped that FGC students will feel supported and understood while in college, which as a result may increase their retention and degree attainment. This research has the potential to significantly impact the educational and vocational theories and practices of counseling and higher education.

Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory is “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained
from social research” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.2). By means of constant comparative analysis (the moving back and forth between data collection and analysis), data is conceptualized, patterns and themes (also known as concepts) are identified, and relationships between themes or patterns are developed into a theory. Unlike most theories, Grounded Theory does not begin with any hypotheses, preconceived notions or pre-determined research design, instead this theory is driven by the data with the belief that theory will originate in and emerge from the data collected from the participants. This theory focuses on a process (including human actions and interactions and how they result from and influence one another) as it relates to a particular topic. This research method begins with the data and uses the data to develop a theory. The ultimate goal of Grounded Theory is the development of a theory about a particular process and interrelationship among the concepts or themes (Creswell, 2002). The application of Grounded Theory allows the researcher to develop predictions, explanations and interpretations of social phenomena.

Grounded Theory research is conducted in real social environments. This theory primarily uses interviewing as the main source of data collection. Additional information can also be collected from observations of behavior, videotapes, documents or anything else with significant relevance. When using Grounded Theory it is imperative that the data being collected incorporates the perspectives and voices of those who are being studied (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) and collected directly from the population that is being studied. Data collection begins and analysis takes place immediately. While being led by the data and analysis, the researcher continues the analysis until he or she reaches a point
of saturation, meaning the researcher has learned as much as possible about the concepts or themes. Any inconsistencies found might suggest that the concepts or themes identified and interrelationships be revised. Eventually the themes evolve into one theory. This theory will show the interrelations among the various concepts (or themes) identified by participants.

Participants

This study includes participants who were enrolled in an undergraduate program at Ohio University during the 2007-2008 academic year. This study targeted traditional aged (18-24 years old) FGC students who come from families where neither parent or guardian has earned a bachelors degree. The researcher aimed to have an ethnically diverse (i.e., White, African-American, Latino, and Native American) group of 6-10 male and female participants who are enrolled on the Athens campus. However, given the demographic composition of Ohio University students it is likely that the sample is not representative of the student population. Many, although not all, may come from low-income families. The FGC student group includes participants in the Ohio University College Adjustment Program (CAP), also known as Student Support Services (SSS) and students who self-identified themselves as FGC. Additionally, consistent with snowball sampling methodology in qualitative research (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981), participants were asked to provide the researcher with names of friends who might also be interested in participating in the study.
Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to test the language and substance of the interview questions and to identify any aspects of the research study that might need improvement. The pilot study involved FGC students who were participants in the McNair Scholar program at Ohio University. The McNair Scholars Program is a federally funded program that assists talented undergraduate FGC and low-income or underrepresented students in the preparation and pursuit of an advanced degree. The study consisted of four FGC student participants (3 females and 1 male), all of whom were traditional (ages 18-24 years of age) students. Three students were African-American and one was White. In the pilot study, students were interviewed and asked to create a concept map based upon any thoughts, feelings, and experiences that relate to being a FGC student. At the conclusion of the pilot study, the interviews and concept maps were reviewed for recurring themes and inconsistencies. The insights gained from the pilot study were used to develop a knowledge basis for establishing a set of interview questions for study participants.

Participants in the pilot study were asked to respond to these interview questions:

1. Please discuss your decision to go to college.
2. Were there things or people that influenced your decision to go to college?
3. What were/are your expectations of college?
4. What are your vocational (career) goals?
5. Can you tell me what shaped your vocational goals?
6. Who has had the greatest impact on who you have become and why?
7. What are your familial beliefs about education?
8. What motivates you and why?

9. Please discuss ways in which your college experience may differ from students who are non-FGC.

10. Please describe a time when you felt supported.

11. On a scale of one to five, how likely are you to complete your undergraduate degree?

12. In general, on a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your self-efficacy (your belief in your ability to accomplish a goal or task), with one being the least and ten being the greatest?

Based on the feedback from participants, most found it difficult to limit their thoughts, feelings and experiences to one word. In an effort to make the concept mapping less complex the researcher adapted the concept mapping for the actual study by allowing participants to express their thoughts, feelings and experiences as a first-generation college student in three words or less. In an effort to make the interview questions more consistent with the practices of qualitative research, the researcher revised the questions so they are more open-ended, thus allowing the participants of the study to discuss that which they perceived as most significant. Additionally, the researcher adjusted the scale of question #12 so that it is consistent with question #11.

In the pilot study the researcher used Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) grounded theory approach to data analysis. This approach includes the following steps: (1) open coding, (2) axial coding, and (3) selective coding. In this process the researcher combined both the concepts and their interconnections to describe what happens with the self-efficacy of
first-generation college students while enrolled in college.

Once the concepts (or themes) were identified the researcher compared them to themes that emerged from the concept maps. The researcher utilized the concepts maps as a means of checking for inconsistencies between the themes that emerge from the interview and those in the concepts. The culmination of these themes served as working hypotheses for analysis of the data and the development of a hypothesis. In the event that confirming and disconfirming evidence was gathered the themes were revised and member checking occurred for clarification. Each of the four participants quoted will be notated with a P.X with X representing each participant in the order that the interviews occurred. Some examples of the concepts that emerged from the pilot study are:

*Family expectations.* All of the students were aware of their FGC status and expressed their obligation to their families. For example, when asked about their family’s beliefs about education one African-American female student stated:

P.3 I fulfilled the responsibility of going to college (because my two older brothers did not). You may be able to have dreams but you have to be able to support your family too.

*Peer/familial Influences.* Each participant discussed the ways in which they were influenced by family and friends to go to college. When asked who shaped their vocational and career goals an African-American female stated:

P.3 My twin sister actually influenced me to go to college.”

Another student, an African American male stated:
There were not a lot of influences in my family to go to college. I felt the need to excel beyond some other family members. There was a friend of mine (at the foster care) that actually got me to think about doing more and finding out how to go to college.

Determinations. When asked to rate their level of self-efficacy (question #12), although the responses varied, they all ranked themselves favorably with average to high levels of self-efficacy. Likewise, when asked about completing college they responded:

P.2 I expect to graduate. I never doubted I could graduate. Whether I graduate with a 2.5 or a 3.9, despite the difference, I will graduate.

P.4 Yes. Most definitely.

Another participant, a White female, stated:

P.1 Yes, I have to. I’m the only one in my family who has, so there’s a lot of pressure on me (to finish). I would feel bad if I didn’t.

Procedure

Students were recruited through program email notices and flyers posted in campus buildings. Additionally, participants in the study identified other prospective FGC participants. After identifying the participants for the study, the researcher established a time for students to be interviewed. Once an interview time was established, the researcher then followed up with a phone call or email to confirm. Formal interviews lasted approximately one hour, depending on the participant’s responsiveness. Students’ participation was voluntary. Therefore, at any time during the interview, students could choose to no longer continue to participate in the study. Before the interview occurred,
participants were given a written informed consent form to read and sign. Each participant was given a copy of the form for their records. In addition, participants were asked to complete a demographic form.

To ensure various perspectives and viewpoints of FGC, the researcher conducted and tape recorded interviews with 6-10 participants. During the interview participants were asked to respond to the following research questions:

1. How do FGC students define personal success?
2. How does self-efficacy affect the self defined academic and social success of FGC students?

The interview procedure varies by student. Either immediately following or prior to the interview participants were asked to create a concept map (a schematic tool used for organizing and representing a set of concepts in the form of knowledge) that reflects their personal thoughts, feelings and experiences as a FGC student. At the conclusion of the study, participants were given a debriefing letter. Should a participant experience visible discomfort while participating in the study, he or she was provided with a list of campus support services. After the initial interview, information was reviewed and analyzed. In the event that conflicting concepts or themes emerged among the participant interviews and concept maps, the researcher contacted participants to schedule a follow-up interview and/or a focus group meeting.

This research study adheres to the Ohio University Guidelines for Research with Human Subjects. As previously stated, all participants receive a copy of the written informed consent explaining in detail the purpose of the study. All interviews were
located in private, comfortable, accessible, quiet settings that would lend themselves to audio recording. Such places included an office, a university library study room, and a meeting room on campus. The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and saved to a CD, which was then locked in a file drawer in the researcher’s office. Only the dissertation chair and researcher have access to these interviews. The CD of interviews, concept maps and demographic questionnaires were destroyed once the dissertation was approved.

Methodology

Interviews

A blend of qualitative methods, interviews (see Appendix D), and concept mapping (see Appendix E) were implemented as a means of collecting data for this study. During the interview participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. Tell me about your decision to go to college.
2. What things or people influenced your decision to go to college?
3. What were/are your expectations of college?
4. What are your vocational or career goals?
5. What shaped your vocational or career goals?
6. Who has had the greatest impact on who you have become, and why?
7. What are your family’s beliefs about education?
8. What motivates you and why?
9. Please describe a time when you felt supported.
10. How do you think your college experience has differed from students who are non-first generation college students?

11. On a scale of one to five, how likely are you to complete your undergraduate degree (1=least likely, 2=somewhat likely, 3= unsure, 4= likely, 5= most likely)?

12. In general on a scale of one to five with one being the least and ten being the greatest (1=no belief, 2= little belief, 3= some belief, 4= much belief, 5= absolute belief), how would you rate your belief in your ability to accomplish a goal or task that you’ve set for yourself?

13. How would you define success? Is this your definition or others?

14. How would you describe your success at Ohio University?

15. What two or three things have impacted your belief in your ability to accomplish a set goal or task?

16. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about being a first-generation college student?

Concept Mapping

Concept maps are schematic tools used for organizing and representing a set of concepts in the form of knowledge and information (Novak & Gowin, 1984). Participants were given instructions on creating a concept map and asked to brainstorm and identify key concepts (thoughts, feelings and/or experiences) that express their experiences. Each participant developed a concept map using the key concepts that arose while reflecting on his or her experiences as a first-generation college student. Participant maps included
concepts or themes associated with being a FGC student, enclosed in circles or boxes, and relationships between concepts indicated by a connecting line and linking word between two concepts or themes. Participants were asked to link the concepts in a way that made sense to them. Linking words on the line specify the relationship between the two concepts. The central or main theme(s) have sub-themes (or experiences) placed in a non-, uni-, or bi-directional order based on their level of significance. When creating a concept map, it is possible that participants may have several concepts to represent their experiences. Due to the various linkages, the participants may not be satisfied with their map. In the event that this occurs, participants were given the opportunity to create another concept map so that their map was accurately represented.

Data Analysis

Students’ responses to the interview questions were analyzed based on the patterns or trends across the given responses. Responses that refer to similar or related outcomes were grouped together as a means of organizing the data. These groupings were analyzed, and tentative themes were developed to convey the relationship of the responses and the concepts. As mentioned previously, the researcher used the following steps of Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) grounded theory approach to analyze data collected from the interviews: (1) open coding, (2) axial coding, (3) selective coding and (4) development of theory.

Open Coding

In open coding the researcher is aiming to identify, divide and organize the data based on commonalities found in the concepts or themes. This aspect of coding reduces the data into a small set of themes (or categories) that appear to describe the phenomenon.
that is being studied. After transcribing the interviews the researcher reviewed the transcription for concepts and grouped those concepts that were similar.

**Axial Coding**

Axial coding is the process of interrelating concepts (or categories) with each other. The focus of this process is to determine more about each category. During this process the researcher continuously moves back and forth between data collection, open coding and axial coding, as a way of refining the categories and their interconnectedness (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During this process the researcher seeks to determine more about each concept. In doing so the researcher used the concepts identified previously to see if there is a relationship with any new interview data.

**Selective Coding**

Selective coding is the process of choosing one concept (or category) to be the core, and relating all other categories to that one. In general, the concepts (or categories) and their interrelationships are combined to develop a single storyline that describes what happens in the phenomenon being studied (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

**Summary**

This study used the qualitative method of Grounded Theory. According to Glaser (1967), Grounded Theory allows researchers the autonomy to develop their own systemic theory. Grounded Theory is a suitable methodology because the focus of the theory itself is similar in nature to Self-Efficacy Theory. Both theories seek to explain a process which allows a theory to be derived in a natural setting. These theories look at human actions and how they result from and influence one another in their natural environments.
This researcher sought to interweave Self-Efficacy Theory with the experiences of FGC students, which can be done in a systematic method when applied in Grounded Theory. Based on the results of the pilot study, the following themes arose: family expectations, peer/familial influences, and determination. The information that participants provided on their demographic questionnaires correlates with the present research findings which suggest that most FGC students are female, low-income and ethnic minorities. As a result of the pilot study, the researcher has found that the best research practice is to vary the research procedure by alternating between conducting interviews and concept mapping when interviewing participants. This study also benefited from the researcher revising the interview questions, thus allowing the participants the opportunity to share any additional thoughts or comments prior to the conclusion of the interview and by allowing participants more flexibility with the number of concepts used in their concept maps.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Interviews were conducted with ten traditional-aged undergraduate students (four seniors, two juniors, and four sophomores) from Ohio University regarding their experiences as FGC students and their perception of the motivational factors and experiences that contribute to their level of self-efficacy and overall level of success.

The participant pool consisted of six females and four males within the age bracket of nineteen to twenty-four years of age, with a mean age of 20.5 years. Three of the participating students reported being participants in the College Adjustment Program (CAP), which is a federally funded TRIO program that provides academic support for FGC, underrepresented and disabled students.

Of the ten participants, six identified themselves as African-American, one Caucasian, one Italian, one Caucasian/Native American and one Asian American/African-American. Three of the ten participants were transfer students.

In regards to employment, one student reported being employed full-time, six reported being employed part-time, two reported working during the summer only, and one student reported having no employment. All participants in the study, with the exception of one, reported having other commitments not related to school (i.e., parents, children, significant others, student organizations and volunteer work). All of the participants reported receiving some sort of funding to pay for school. Such funding includes loans, grants, employment, scholarships (merit and need-based) and financial assistance from parents. Additional demographic information of participants can be found in Table 1.
This study answered two main research questions: how do FGC students define success and what effect does self-efficacy have on the social and academic success of FGC students. Data was gathered through interviews, information provided on demographic questionnaires and concept maps. The data collected from the student interviews was analyzed by use of the Grounded Theory approach. The researcher used Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) open and axial coding to identify emerging categories and the relationships among those categories.
The researcher began this process by breaking down each of the responses given by participants. Each response was then labeled with a word or phrase that the researcher felt best expressed the FGC phenomenon. In some instances responses provided by participants conveyed more than one phenomenon. The researcher proceeded through each interview and each response, identifying and labeling the responses with similar names based upon the phenomenon that was represented. After identifying the various phenomena within the data the researcher grouped also known as categorizing those concepts that were similar.

The researcher implemented open coding to identify and categorize the concepts that emerged. Next, the researcher utilized axial coding to explore the connections and relationships among the emerging categories, properties and their dimensions. Throughout the axial coding process transcriptions were continuously revisited. As a means of potentially explaining the FGC phenomenon the data was organized and new relationships and connections among the patterns and themes were discovered. The analyses of the transcriptions and participant responses were initially labeled under four broad categories that represent the experiences of FGC students: aspiration, influences, acceptance of responsibility, and success. However, as the researcher revisited the data the themes centered around the students’ families and their transition into college continued to emerge. The researcher then relabeled the categories to more accurately represent the experiences of FGC students: family, transitional issues, and success. These three emergent categories reflect students’ perspectives of their experiences as FGC students’ in pursuit of a postsecondary education.
Each of the ten participants quoted will be notated with a P.X with X representing each participant in the order that the interviews occurred. Table 2 lists the categories, properties and dimensions that emerged.

Table 2.

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Family

*Family* emerged as the first category during the analysis of the transcriptions.

Many FGC students have been positively influenced by their family, especially by their parents. Six out of ten of the participants expressed that the decision to attend college was determined and shaped by their parents. Participants shared the significance that their
parents placed on education. Although these students seem to embrace the challenge of being the first in their families to go to college and earn a bachelors degree this was not without a cost. FGC students faced many challenges as they pursued college. Despite the pressure and unexpected challenges, participants in the study shared the many ways in which they were supported throughout the process. Participants in the study conveyed the family expectations and pressures that were indirectly placed upon them as a result of their FGC status.

Influence in choices. The first property of family is influence in choices. The information disclosed during the interviews suggested that most participants viewed themselves as having limited options. Many of the participants reported their parents giving them the option to go to college or to work. Oftentimes using themselves as an example, the parents of FGC students reinforced to their children that college was the best option. After having observed their parents’ hard work, lack of job satisfaction and financial burdens, the FGC students chose to pursue postsecondary education. To reflect the options given by parents, this property has been separated into two dimensions: work and college. The work dimension refers to those students whose parents presented them with possible options after high school; however of those options presented, the students made the conscious decision to go to college. The work dimension is evidenced by the participants’ statements below:

P.6 I don’t think there was a decision. It was never really an option. Ever since the sixth grade my father has put me in programs and prepared me to graduate from college. So there was never really a decision. I was always taught that it was college or working class. So by the time I was old enough to make a decision on my own, my mindset was that if I don’t
have any special talent and I don’t go to college then I’m screwed. So I guess I’m just going to go to college.

P.8 My decision to go to college revolved around either going to college or getting a job with benefits. It just came down to that. My parents wouldn’t have it any other way with me. That’s what they said, “It’s either go to college or get a job with benefits. That’s it”. They were very straightforward with me.

The college dimension refers to those students whose parents stressed the necessity and expectation that they go to college, thus giving the impression that college was the only option. The college dimension is indicated by the following statements:

P.3 I pretty much didn’t have a choice. My parents always told me I was going [to college].

P.4 I really don’t think I had any other choice but to go to school. They [my parents] always tell me, “Don’t do what I did. Don’t try to be like me, be better than me.” And they didn’t go to school so I guess that’s why they push me to go to school. And with things being the way they are now you need at least a degree to get a decent job.

P.7 I felt it was very important to go to college because my parents didn’t go to college; and it seems anymore that you have to go to college to get a career in anything.

P.9 I don’t think it was my decision. I look at it as a decision to be obedient or disobedient. I didn’t look at it as a decision. I looked at it [college] as the next step.

Parental perceptions of education. The second property of family is parental perception of education. While analyzing the data, the participants’ transcriptions revealed that FGC parents place an emphasis on education. The degree to which their parents valued education seemed to directly impact their level of commitment to education. Participants’ comments imply that FGC parents and families encourage them to attend college in an effort to increase their child’s employment opportunities and
financial freedom, thus making their lifestyle better than their parents. Some examples that express their *parental perceptions of education* are as follows:

P.2 My education comes first. They are always concerned that I am going to work too many hours and not get to study enough. My parents didn’t want me to even have to work.

P.5 I kind of feel like they [my parents] think it is the right thing to do, to go to school so that I don’t end up like other people that they see about the city and things like that—so that I can do something with my life instead of just complaining about the job that I may have or not making enough money and things like that.

P.6 My family believes that education is the answer. My father believes that education is the answer to everything, it’s a cure-all. If you get an education your life is going to be golden and that’s it. My mother is a do-the-best-you-can-type person. If I get an education, I do. If I don’t, then I can make my own way, the way she did. My family seems to feel like education is something that is not for them, that it takes a different kind of person, a different lifestyle. So it is one of those untouchable, bigger-than-life things for most of them—except for my dad. And then even a parent like my father who didn’t go to college, he feels like it is the golden ticket. What is there to complain about? So he negates all of the stress and the work. He knows that it is there, but for him it is like, “You can either struggle in school or you can struggle everyday at work like me and hate it.”

P.8 They [my parents] don’t know a lot about college, they don’t know a lot about anything, they don’t know a lot about college period. I guess their belief in education is that you have to get it because they only have a third and fifth grade education. My mom still says to me to this day, “You don’t want to push a dumpster the rest of your life—go to college or get a good job.” That’s what their belief about education is. Even though they said you can choose a job with benefits—with me especially it was like go to college. Go to college. Trust me, just go. See if it’s good for you. So their beliefs are very pro-education.

P.9 If you don’t have an education you will limit your opportunities. And if you do go ahead and get an education then you have all of the opportunities in the world. It’s just how you do it.
**Expectations.** The third property of *family* is expectations. FGC students are often perceived as being *smart* because of their academic potential. As a result, their families reminded them that they are privileged, more so than other family members because they are receiving a college education. Consequently, FGC students are expected to surpass their parents both academically and financially. Most FGC students fear the thought of ever having to return to their families without having been successful in college. Some examples of these *expectations* are as follows:

**P.1** It’s just like the same with a lot of parents, at least in the African American community: I always want my children to do better than me so I will do the best that I can so that they can progress in life more than what I have. It was more like that. Of course the older generation, my grandparents, they talk about how they fought so hard to have schooling. They will never let me take it for granted because of how hard they fought for it.

**P.2** I think I’m motivated in school a lot by my family and my own expectations of myself. I have high expectations of myself.

**P.4** They [my family] were like, “You are so smart”. I’m like the brain child in my family. Everyone in my family, they think I’m like the golden child. They expect a lot out of me.

**P.5** My mom says she’s going to be disappointed if I don’t go to school and things like that. For me, it’s like a big accomplishment for my family seeing as how I am the first person [to go to college]. Some people take it for granted, especially those who have full scholarships or who don’t have to worry about paying their tuition. They come; they go to class, they don’t go to class—it’s whatever. They take advantage of the fact that they aren’t paying out of the pocket for any of this stuff…She [my grandmother] has always taught me to stand up for myself and just live life and work hard for what I want—not just give in to people and give up. She’s always encouraged me to push toward my goals.

**P.7** They [my parents] can’t imagine me not going to school. If I dropped out of school that would be the end of my relationship with my parents. They think it’s very important…that education is very important. My mom has definitely pushed me a lot, to go to college. She’s pushed me to do well,
go to class, get good grades. And probably my dad, too… I’m kind of like the child he expects the most of because I’m the oldest.

*Pressure to succeed.* The fourth property of family is the pressure to succeed. FGC students report feeling a great burden and responsibility because they are the first in their families to earn a bachelor degree. Participants expressed their appreciation of the sacrifices their families have made. Many of them feel a sense of obligation to be a good example and help pave the way for future family members (i.e., siblings, cousins) and members of their community. Participants in the study indicated how their families pushed them to excel in school. Some examples of pressure to succeed are:

P.1 It is overwhelming, but in a good way. But there are times when you get a little frustrated or flustered because if you’ve come back as I did, for instance, after fall quarter—I did terrible fall quarter. I was a first generation, no experience, had no idea what I was getting into: I bombed fall quarter. When I came back it was very demeaning to come back and see that people put their faith and trust in me that I was going to do good—that they already expected me to succeed—and then for them [anyone in the family/community who knows] to see how terrible I did. I definitely felt the pressure. Especially if you are a first generation, parents go everywhere—they go to the grocery store and are like, “Oh, you know I just wanted to let you know my baby’s in college, my baby’s at the university.” It’s like people that don’t even know you will know something about you, will know that you are in college. When you come back and you don’t do as well as you would have hoped to, it’s definitely a little discouraging.

P.2 I want to do well and I want to make people proud of me because a lot of people put a lot into me.

P.3 I just don’t want to let people down. If I was to quit, my dad, he probably wouldn’t be in agreement, but he would be disappointed. And then I have my baby sister that is behind me, too. I can’t be doing stuff like that because I have to be a role model for her. That’s a lot of pressure. It’s heavy.

P.6 My dad has pushed me so much to see me graduate. I don’t want him to feel like all he’s done was for nothing. My mom is a pay-your-own-way
type of person, and I want to see her relax. I want to be able to take care of her. I want to be able to provide. So now with them [my little cousins, nieces and nephews] I think maybe if they’re not going to do what they’re told, they’ll do what they see…I’ll give them something to look at so even if they don’t listen to me they know that there are other options. I’m like the little diamond in the rough. They [my family] protect me, they shield me. I’m kind of labeled as the goodie-two-shoes, the brain. It hasn’t deterred me, but it is kind of frustrating because I can see that they can do it, too, and they can’t see it. So now, since I’m the only one [in college], I feel like it is my responsibility to enlighten them, to show them, to open doors, to push all of them.

P.8 I can say that growing up in a first generation atmosphere, going to college—they put a lot on you, like your whole family. It’s not just your parents—like I have a lot of aunts and uncles they are very: ‘do this, do this, this is what you need to do.’ They always give you that scenario of ‘you could end up like this’. You could end up doing general labor, general maintenance, mechanics, and machinist. They always put those kinds of stipulations in front of you. So I hate to say this, but it’s kind of fear. But it really works because they show you what it’s like to work hard jobs.

P.9 I have a strong conscience, but I only have that conscience because it was instilled in me. So when I go to class everyday I think about the people who came this way before me and made it possible. I think about my mom, who’s been there, and I don’t want to disappoint her. I think about where I’d like to be and what’s necessary to get there, or where I don’t want to be. And I just think about wanting to be happy and to be independent. You know, not totally independent where no one can do anything for me, but where if I want to do things for myself, then I can.

P.10 I want to work hard in college so that I can get a job and the people that grow up in the hood can get the education that I never had. To get them prepared and stuff… I want to work hard in college so that I can get a job [as a teacher] and the people that grow up in the hood can get the education that I never had. To get them prepared and stuff…for high school or college.

Support. The fifth property of family is support. Overall, participants in the study reported feeling supported by their families, and in some cases their community, too.

Most often the families of FGC students were unable to support them financially, but
when they could they did so. They did, however, provide support in other ways. Many participants in the study explained how the received emotional support and ongoing encouragement from their family. Their families esteemed them highly and offered motivation during times of doubt, uncertainty, and stress. For many participants, their well-being and accomplishments were seen as family/community issues and therefore dealt with as such. Some examples of the support that FGC students received from their families (and communities) are:

P.1 The mental, emotional and motivational support is very different. If you are not a first generation student, then you have others to look up to that say, ‘I’ve done it, you can go through it, it’s ok.’ That’s how it goes. But if you are not a first year you can’t have anyone to say, ‘That’s just how it goes, you’ll get through it, you’re alright.’ Instead it’s all, ‘You are doing better than we can, and that’s all we can expect.’ So it’s a very different feel.

P.2 When I said I was retaking it [the course] they [my parents] were like, “Oh, good. You can do better this time. I hope you understand it.” My parents are very supportive when it comes to my education.

P.3 He [my dad] is very supportive; and I know that when I got here my grades started to fall….I got good grades here, but when I got my first ‘D’ I was so ready to go home. I was crying and everything, and he was like, “D”—he calls me D—“It’s ok.” He was supportive. As long as you are doing something positive and trying to better yourself they’re supportive.

P.4 All of my family has had a lot of impact on me, because we can all talk about anything and we all love each other. We do everything together. I feel like my family is not like a lot of other families. I mean, a lot of people say that, but if they saw my family interact then they’d get it…After I got kicked out of school, my parents, they didn’t really scold me or talk down to me. They were like, “What do you have to do to get back [in], and how can we help?” My mom paid for me to take classes at the UC. She would come pick me up sometimes, worked a little bit, and was just there to help and support me. When I needed to talk to someone she gave me advice and encouragement—telling me to write my petition letter. She reviewed it, told me I might want to say this versus this. She’s always been there in my corner. Whenever there is something going on I
can talk to her about it... sometimes I will call my mom or call my dad... just the fact that they sit there and listen, it means a lot.

P.5 I think it [education] is a good thing. They [my family] stand behind it and they encourage me, as well as other children in my family, to go to school. Even though my family does support me, I don’t expect a lot from them when it comes to school, because I know they have other expenses that they have to take care of.

P.6 The programs that my father put me in...they always taught me that you can do what you want. You have control. You can accomplish the goals that you have for yourself. So I’ve never really been in a place where I didn’t feel like I couldn’t do it. I really don’t consider failure as an option. Opposition such as where I come from, and being a minority really fuels me to do better because I don’t feel like anyone is better than me. I want to show other minorities and other women that they can do whatever they want. So I think that drives me—the opposition drives me more. I guess it’s natural. If you had everything given to you it wouldn’t be a big deal.

P.7 Fall quarter I signed up for a very difficult schedule and I ended up failing two of my classes—and I thought that that was going to be the end of it for me. I thought that my parents were going to pull me out of school—that they were going to say that this is not accepted—but they were really supportive. My mom was like it happens, ‘It was your first quarter, you were nervous.’ They were really supportive and keep pushing me to get on the books and to get help when I need help, which I do. I get free tutoring through CAP. My mom is telling me constantly to keep with the books...to just do my best.

P.8 My mom was always there to talk to us and give us advice, and to comfort us. You know, my mom is definitely the person in my life who has brought me down this path. She was very strong-willed. She’s crazy, but she’s very straightforward. She was the one who said job or college, that’s it. “You are either finding a job or we’re sending you to college.” That’s my mother, definitely.

P.9 When I graduated high school and got ready to come to college, everybody in my church—they supported me. They gave me gifts, they gave me money, or just stuff that I was going to need here like body stuff, or towels, or things to put in my room. The people in my neighborhood did the same. The family did the same. Everybody realized it was a movement and they did something to make that happen.

P.10 Every time I go home with my mom...I feel supported.
The use of axial coding revealed five properties of family which are influence on choices, parental perceptions of education, expectations, pressure to succeed and support. The first category, family, is depicted figure 1.

Transitional Issues

Transitional issues emerged as the second category of the data analysis.

Participants in the study identified the various transitional issues that have significantly impacted their college matriculation and continued pursuit of postsecondary education. As FGC students chose to pursue their aspirations of obtaining a degree they began to go through a transformation, which required them to accept the pressures and realities of both environments–home and college. Based on participants’ responses, the data revealed that most challenges FGC students face occur as they transition from high school to college. Below are examples of transitional issues discussed:

P.1 If you already know what to expect from the college environment—about how financial aid works, how to receive money, how scholarships are awarded, things of that nature—if you know the whole process of how that works then it is a lot easier to say we can afford for you to go to college. We can send you there with no worries of struggling.

P.4 I think some people whose parents have been to college and everything, I think some of them are spoiled because not everybody’s parents want them to get out and learn the lesson and really go out and be corrected by it. They just kind of say, ‘Just go because I went, and this is what we do in our family.’ They’re not even sure if this is something they want to do. I think my experience has just taught me different across the board.

P.6 Once you get started it’s pretty much just class, it’s just school. So outside of scheduling your own classes, I don’t think there isn’t too much that is different from high school. It’s just the ins and the outs [of college]. Once you are on campus and you are on your way, I think everyone is kind of in the same boat, as far as getting through and the level of learning and all that type stuff.
Figure 1. Category One: Family
**College knowledge.** The first property of *transitional issues* is college knowledge. During the interviews, as students reflected on their transition into college, they recalled the challenges encountered as a result of their lack of information about college and the admissions process. In some instances there was an absence of information, whereas in others students were misinformed. For many of the participants in the study, especially those who were not involved in Upward Bound, the college admissions process and transition into college was complex and stressful for both the parents and student. For example, most of the participants reported having difficulty completing their FAFSA and had minimal knowledge of what to expect in college. In many instances, FGC students referred to other family members (i.e., cousins, aunts, uncles) for assistance with their college admission and preparation. The participants’ comments denote that FGC students and their parents lack significant information that would make their preparation and transition into college a smooth process. The participants’ quotes are noted:

P.2  I heard lots of stories in high school about how professors didn’t care if you passed the class and they didn’t care whether you passed it or not—they went to college to teach because they didn’t care about the students, and they were always in big classes and it didn’t matter.

P.6  I think the beginning phase is where the most differences are. Starting with financial aid, applying to colleges, SAT/ACT scores and testing—all the things to get you started. For somebody who doesn’t know and is just searching around and running around, even just the FAFSA was rough. So somebody who has a parent, let alone two parents, who have already done it—I’m sure it probably lessens the stress a little bit. The feelings of frustration and [being] overwhelmed are like one in the same because they are both caused by the same thing like being unprepared.

P.7  It was really hard at first because my parents didn’t know anything about paying for school or anything. So we had to rely a lot on my cousins and my aunts and uncle to explain to us that you have to get students loans if
you can’t or don’t get scholarships or grants or things like that to pay for it. And I think someone who had been to college before would know that you have to, whereas we had to rely on my family members to help us out a little bit. That’s the big part, paying for school, and we had no idea what to do. It was very difficult. We went in there with our eyes shut. We had no idea what was going on. That was the big thing I think that was harder on us because my parents didn’t go to college.

P.8 I know a kid that works for Mac. Or they know someone. Or their dad or mom knows someone who works for Mac. Like my parents don’t have those types of connections. I know kids who—especially with having parents who went to college—who have. ‘My dad told me this, my mom told me this’ about college. They have access to information that I’ve never had. I’ve had to learn everything by trial and error coming to college. It makes you stronger, but it’s usually just access to information that is really hard for me. That’s what’s been the biggest challenge and something that a lot of the other kids have been exposed to and I haven’t.

P.9 I just didn’t know that it was going to be so difficult. I didn’t really know what to expect. Nobody before me had gone to college so I didn’t really have any expectations. I didn’t visit any colleges or anything.

*Exposure and preparation.* The second property of *transitional issues* is exposure and preparation. Based on participants’ responses, students’ level of preparation for college (or lack thereof) was indicative of the degree of exposure that they received from support systems and college preparatory programs, such as Upward Bound. Those students who participated in the Upward Bound Program seemed to be at a greater advantage than their other FGC peers in various ways (i.e., college preparatory courses, college visits, better study habits, and assistance with college admissions forms) as they received information about college and were exposed to the college campus at an earlier age. Participants in the study explained the ways in which they were exposed to college and its accessibility to them as students. As evidenced in the statements below, the
property of exposure and preparation has two dimensions, which are, college preparation services and no college preparation services:

P.3 The closer it came for me to come here, my cousin…came on my visit, and she shared things I should be looking for with me. That was maybe a month before I was getting ready to come here.

P.5 I was in Upward Bound during high school. That’s actually how I heard about OU because we came here on a trip. I fell in love with the campus so I talked to some people, and then people I went to church with, they went here and were telling me about the school. That’s how I learned about OU and decided I was going to come here and give it a try.

P.6 I think he [my father] made me a professional because that’s all I remember. Just thinking about my life, I would say more than half of it was school…preparing for school… I was also in Upward Bound going to classes in the summer on a college campus. That gave me the feel of college so that when it was time to go it was just like another day in class. I never really thought about all of the extra stuff… Every summer since sixth grade I have been on a college campus [in Upward Bound]. Every class that I have ever complained about, my dad would take it back to, “Well, you have to do this because you have to go to college.” Or, “You have to do well because your GPA is going to get you into college.” Or, “You can’t go out and acting crazy, drinking and doing drugs because you have to go to college.” I wasn’t allowed to get ‘C’s. Everything was ‘A’s and ‘B’s, and if I got too many ‘B’s I would still get in trouble. Everything has always been preparing for college. There really wasn’t anything else. Anything outside of that was probably just a relief or an outlet, but my life has pretty much been school.

P.7 I didn’t really know anything going into college. I mean I knew the classes were going to be big, but I didn’t know that I was going to have classes with like 200 people. My first quarter was definitely an eye opener. I didn’t realize that I was going to have to study every single night. I mean people tell you that but you are like, ‘Yeah, whatever.’ Like in high school they tell you that you have to study too and you don’t have to. So I kind of had that outlook. But then I got to school and I realized you really do have to study a lot; you can’t just slack off or you will fail. It was a big thing for me to realize—it was very hard.

P.8 I came out of high school not knowing what I was going to expect in college. I didn’t have parents that went to college and I didn’t have any relatives who went away to college. I’ve looked for the services and I’ve
found some good ones, but there are many ways that you have to sympathize with a kid. You have to show a kid how to do a FAFSA, not say, ‘go do a FAFSA.’ I had to get my tax lady to do it. I think they really don’t understand how some kids have no clue what they are doing. Because of that, for me, I’m ending up going to college for five years and had to switch my major. Without explaining things to us…and there is a little bit a fault on my part so I’m not completely blaming the university, but they could have done a little better to help kids, especially in financial aid.

P.9 Last year when I applied…I kind of felt cheated because when I went to do the FAFSA I didn’t have all the help. I feel that if I had had more help filling it out then I could have got more aid. I just went in to that kind of shaky. So I feel that people who have parents who have done it repeatedly then they are more prepared going into the FAFSA. They probably have a higher income so they aren’t as worried about finances. There was nothing else that I really felt disadvantaged about. Someone who is first generation might lack knowledge. Like I said before, people who’s parents went to college they’ve experienced the campus life so they know how to prepare the student. They’ve gone through the financial situation so they know how to prepare the student. They’ve been through that pressure so they can prepare them emotionally as well as physically. And I feel like they don’t have to do as much trial and error as someone who is first generation would, because they can learn from other people’s mistakes. Do they take advantage of it all the time? I don’t know. But they have that option.

*Finances.* The third property of **transitional issues** is finances. Participants’ comments suggest that their personal and familial financial circumstances are an added stressor to their academic endeavor. As stated below, many FGC students are having to pay for the bulk, if not all, of their college tuition and living expenses. Additionally, many FGC students expressed feeling as if they had a greater commitment to their education than their non-FGC peers because they were personally making a financial commitment to their education. Identifying and obtaining funds to cover the cost of their college education seems to be the greatest stressor for FGC students and their families.
Participants in this study reported working (during the academic year and/or summer) and obtaining other financial resources such as student loans and/or scholarships as a means of paying for their education. In instances where FGC students receive some financial assistance from their parents, they acknowledge the hard work of their parents to support them despite their limited financial resources. Overall, despite their lack of financial resources, FGC students report feeling encouraged and supported by family and members of their hometown community. Some of the participants’ financial experiences are stated below:

P. 2  Well they [parents of non-FGC students] probably make more than my parents do, so if they don’t have to work it’s more like an extra-curricular activity and not, ‘If I don’t get this much money by the end of the quarter then we are going to be in trouble when we go to pay for what we have to pay for at the beginning of next quarter.’

P. 5  Since I’ve been here I have paid for everything on my own. My parents and my grandparents—nobody has helped me with tuition, housing, or anything like that. Everything has either come from me getting financial aid or out of my pocket.

P. 6  The financial is always an issue. Statistically if your parents went to college then you are probably more fortunate than the family that I come from. Also, I think it is easier to take it for granted.

P. 8  I decided that I was going to go to college and all of the money that my mom and dad set aside for me—that was going to go toward my college. I mean it’s not going to pay for all of it, but that’s where the majority of it is. I think it’s like $10,000 that they saved up for all of us. And that’s from hard work. That’s not from just sitting around and calculating numbers like some people do. My mom and dad worked hard…I mean, the greatest challenge for me is trying to—even though I have had a good outlook…to see how many kids are exposed to certain things that you’re not exposed to, because of how much money you have or the type of parents that you have.

P. 10 Stressful—I mean these people [non FGCs] are like, ‘I got an F? Well my mom’s paying for it anyway so I’ll just take it over.’ It’s different because
they give their child[ren] money. Suppose my mom—she helped me out—but she don’t pay my school bills, she don’t pay my house bills. She pays my cell phone, but that’s it. As far as rent, I have to come up with that myself. She does what she can, but when it comes to privilege they [non-FGCs] get their dorms paid for, their tuition paid for…it’s crazy.

*Adaptation*. The fourth property of *transitional issues* is adaptation. Participants’ responses reveal that students had to adjust and adapt to the college environment because in many cases they did not know what to anticipate. Participants varied in the ways they had to adapt. For some students adaptation consisted of being in a classroom of 200 students, whereas for others factors such as improving study skills and connecting with faculty were key components. Examples of this adaptation are evidenced in the quotes below:

- **P.2** People who have gone through the college experience usually have a better idea of what to expect when people go. So I found myself a lot of times trying to explain to my dad why I’m having trouble, or why something has to be done, or why I have to live on campus. No, I can’t live at home.

- **P.3** I have definitely renewed my relationship with God while I’ve been here because when I got here I didn’t have any friends so I didn’t have a choice. It was just me and my room and my Bible.

- **P.5** I came from a predominantly black high school and I didn’t expect it to be the way that it was—predominantly white in the classrooms, things like that. It was a big culture shock for me.

- **P.6** Whatever happened, I had to deal with it. I probably didn’t really consider the setbacks [of being a FGC] until, like I said, the beginning stages—the financial aid and getting into college. That was probably the only time, until I started to get really frustrated with my classes and realized that my father could not understand what I was going through. So I’ll say pre-college and then not until recently that I would think. Well maybe this is why.
P.7 It’s still hard to adapt. I didn’t know anybody when coming here. I knew a couple people, but it was just like acquaintances. So it was just like a whole new world to me, but I made friends.

P.8 I talk to professors, and I would get as much information about what I needed to do in college because I was undecided my first year. Everything has been a brick wall after brick wall. It’s like “boom” stop, but you have to find some way over it. I wanted to go into broadcast journalism, but I didn’t know about the prestigious Scripps school and how strict they were. Well, I didn’t get in to it, so I declared undecided-then had to figure out how to get into t-com. I get in to t-com and I have a horrible advisor who didn’t even contact me within the first quarter. I sent him e-mails and he never contacted me back. Then I found out that you have to go through a certain sequence of classes or you have to wait until the next year. So I didn’t get in to any classes until the end of my sophomore year. And then I take an internship and decide I don’t really like it and am switching majors my junior year. Now I can say that I’m on my toes…. It’s mainly just adapting to the college life and what that’s all about.

P.10 When I was growing up I was mis-educated…All the education I had growing up…I didn’t learn to study or nothing. I had to find ways of doing things, to reach my peak.

Balancing responsibilities. The fifth property of transitional issues is balancing responsibilities. As stated previously, many FGC students have multiple roles. Their roles include but are not limited to students, employees, siblings, and parents. The analysis of the data showed that students want to experience “college life”; however not at the expense of their education. During these college years students seem to be making a conscious effort to learn how to balance their education and their fun. Some examples are as follows:

P.2 Last year I avoided 'going out' as a general rule, so I spent more time studying. Now I'm learning to balance.

P.8 I’ve went out, I’ve had fun, but I’ve never been able to have the no-responsibilities fun that some people have been able to have… I know that sounds cheesy, but you are supposed to have fun in college. I’ve had a lot of fun, but not the typical fun.
P.10 My perspective from a low-income standpoint sometimes I just wish I hit the lottery or something. It’s fun, but you pretty much go to college to meet new people and expand your education to a higher level. That’s about it. At the same time I don’t have the college life that other people have where they can go out any time they want to. They calling me are we going out tonight? And I’m like I can’t I have to work. It’s painful, but at the same time it’s fine.

With the use of axial coding, the researcher discovered five properties of transitional issues, which are: college knowledge, exposure and preparation, finances, adaptation and balancing responsibilities. These properties found in the second category are shown in Figure 2.
Figure 2. Category Two: Transitional Issues
Success

Success emerged as the third category of the data analysis. Success is often defined in many different ways. The data from the study revealed that participants tend to have differing views of success than others, including their parents. Many of the students’ definitions of personal success encompassed setting and accomplishing their academic goals. There was one commonality: degree attainment. Despite the lack of education, parents and students seem to both agree that degree attainment was significant and a determining factor of success attainment. Examples of FGC definitions of success as it relates to setting and accomplishing goals are indicated by:

P.3  Just having a goal, or something that you are trying to obtain or reach and get. As long as you reach it, you are successful. It doesn’t matter how long it took you to get there, or whatever you had to do to get there.

P.4.  I feel I have been successful because I’ve learned more about myself. I’ve branched out and done things that I might have been uncomfortable with, and grew to like them. So I conquered fears that I might have had. Just being happy with whatever you decide to do—as long as you are happy with yourself. If you set out to do something, and you do it to the best of your ability and are happy with it then you are successful. I don’t think you can really quantify like yeah I’ve got two million dollars, I’m successful. You could have two million dollars and hate yourself, are you really successful? No, successful is being able to enjoy life.

P.5  Accomplishing your goals—setting goals that aren’t easily accomplished, but aren’t too difficult to accomplish—and accomplishing them. Then setting new goals and accomplishing them—pushing yourself to accomplish those goals.

FGC definitions of success. The first property of success is FGC students’ definitions of success. Participants in this study were asked to define personal success. Based on participants responses success four themes emerged. These themes were
divided into four subcategories of **success**: happiness, helping others, getting good grades, and graduating from college.

The subcategory *happiness* refers to an individual reaching a point in which he or she is content. This includes being able to afford basic financial needs, being able to care for family and also being in a position in which one is able to help others. The subcategory *happiness* is indicated by the following statements:

P.1  I believe success is when you truly find where you are happy or content with the process that you have made toward your goal

P.2  I usually picture success the same as my parents on first instinct--money. A college degree is probably considered a success in my family, as is a steady job. When I give it further thought, I think of success as happiness. If I can find a way to help people, make a livable amount of money, and have a family, I'll consider myself successful.

P.8  For me success is—as cheesy as this may sound—it’s what you make it, but at the same time, it’s doing what you love. Those are the two things that really shape success. If you are not doing something you enjoy then you are not going to be happy.

P.10 [Success is] Being happy. If you get the job you want—you’ve obviously been training, you’ve got the job you want. In four, five, six years you’ve got a house and a family. It’s got nothing to do with money because money doesn’t buy it. Just happiness.

The subcategory *helping others* refers to giving back to your community. It is a sense of civic responsibility that consists of helping, improving, and empowering members of the community. Helping others also implies that the FGC student gains personal satisfaction from being able to help someone else. This subcategory is indicated in the following statements:

P.2  That’s always been my passion—to help people.
P.6  I think success is accomplishing your own goals. Because some people are successful when they get their degree, but if that’s not what you want then that is not successful in your eyes. If you want to be a movie star, what is a bachelor’s degree? So I think accomplishing the goals that you have for yourself is success. Goals should somehow improve--giving back to the community or feeding into your community. I think it’s really relevant.

P.9  Somebody can be successful without an education. I would just say that it is to perform to your potential and help other people. It’s [success is] to perform to your potential and to help other people. But just learn what you are capable of doing. Once you learn what you are capable of you can perform to your potential. Once you are in the process of succeeding you should help somebody else. I don’t think being rich is necessarily successful. I’d say you’ve succeeded in being rich, but it’s not holistic success.

The subcategory of getting good grades refers to the attainment of high grades in courses, which would result in a student having a higher grade point average. Having the good grades reaffirms the student’s academic potential and demonstrates that they have mastered the course experience and information. The subcategory getting good grades is indicated by the following statements:

P.3  Well, [to be successful at O.U.] I would want to bring my GPA up…and then to actually finish [college]. Then I’ll be happy, but it’s hard.

P.5  Right now I would have to say getting good grades. It is pushing me to do better because—in the beginning, well in high school I was a straight A student, but the course work wasn’t very difficult. Once I got here it was kind of a shock because I got my first F here. I was like, ok, things aren’t going to be as easy. And I know that I can get A’s here and that things aren’t as hard as people show them to be. You can do it if you put your heart into it, study, all that.

P.6  I guess the majority of the time, the first two years, my goal was, first, to stay focused spiritually and also to get the highest grades possible because I’m on a scholarship.
P.7 Good grades. I see that as being successful. If you get good grades then that means that you have mastered the information. That you know everything there is to know about that.

The subcategory of graduating from college refers to the attainment of a bachelor’s degree. Graduating from college is a pivotal point in the lives of FGC students. It represents overcoming a major milestone in life and gives hope to a brighter future, one that differs from that of their parents. The subcategory of graduating from college is evidenced by the following statements:

P.4 I’m finishing school—that’s something that is clearly not easy. So me graduating soon, that’s successful. That’s something major that I came here to do.

P.5 My uncle went to school, but he didn’t finish so I’m going to be the first to graduate. I want my nieces and nephews to follow in my footsteps so I’m going to finish [college] so that they see that it can be done and that there is nothing wrong with going to college.

P.7 Also, I think to getting in to grad school, I would consider successful because that’s one step closer to getting a career and doing what I want to do.

P.9 Right now my goal is to finish college.

Aspiration. The second property of success is aspiration. When asked about their decision to go to college most of the FGC students expressed how they’ve always aspired to go onto college. In some instances students’ aspiration to go to college stemmed from the requirements needed in order to meet their career goals, whereas for others it was a direct result of their desire to do better than other family members (i.e., setting a positive example for their siblings, cousins and community). Examples of participants’ aspiration to attend college were expressed as follows:

P.1 I’ve always had a desire to learn, you know, to go on to higher education. I
had dreams that went beyond the high school diploma level. So, it kind of forced me to go into college.

P.2 I guess I never really considered not going to college. It was something that I considered as a necessity for me to do so that I could get a good job and support myself, and hopefully be able to afford to have and support a family at some point: a house, all that stuff.

P.5 Well, growing up I always wanted to go to school, like beyond high school. I don’t think there was ever a doubt in my mind that I wasn’t going to go. It was always just a matter of where I was going to go.

P.7 I’ve always known that I wanted to go to college. There was never a doubt that I didn’t want to go to college.

P.9 I believe if you put God first everything else will follow. But I believe the people he uses the most in my life are my mom, and even though my dad wasn’t there, I try to make it positive because he made me a stronger individual…my siblings, indirectly, because they kind of keep me in line. I won’t do certain stuff, because I know that they are watching. They just indirectly keep me in line. They don’t know it, but they do. And my grandma.

_Determination._ The third property of *success* is _determination_. The data analysis showed some consistency in the characteristics of the participants and their level of academic success. Participants in the study expressed their determination to complete their bachelor degree regardless of the amount of time or money that it takes. The following are quotes that exemplify the students’ _determination:_

P.1 We all have a purpose in life and I’d rather at least—even if I was to fail at what I want to do—just the experience of trying to grow and progress to something bigger an better than what I expected is more fulfilling than not even trying at all.

P.3 I try to stay positive so it’s like if I’m putting forth some effort, I should be able to do this. I encourage myself.

P.4 I don’t quit. When I start something, I have to finish.
Getting good grades…. It is pushing me to do better because in the beginning, well in high school I was a straight ‘A’ student, but the course work wasn’t very difficult. Once I got here it was kind of a shock because I got my first ‘F’ here. I was like, ok, things aren’t going to be as easy. And I know that I can get A’s here and that things aren’t as hard as people show them to be. You can do it if you put your heart into it, study, all that. I’ve done a pretty good job of accomplishing the goals that I’ve set and everyday I’m setting more and more goals.

[My father] Pushing me has created an attitude of expectancy: I can do what I want if I work for it, as long as I put my mind to it. I have the self-esteem. I have the confidence. He [my father] shaped my determination and that kind goes into everything else. I really don’t consider failure as an option. Opposition such as where I come from and being a minority really fuel me to do better because I don’t feel like anyone is better than me. I want to show other minorities and other women that they can do whatever they want. So I think that drives me—the opposition drives me more. I guess it’s natural. If you had everything given to you it wouldn’t be a big deal… There is absolutely no way I would go through all of this and not finish [my degree]. That is not an option, at all. I don’t care if I have to crawl across the stage.

I will find some way no matter what to complete it [my degree]. If I can’t financially do it—student loans. I can’t imagine not finishing school. It’s not even a thought in my head. I hate it when I don’t succeed. I just get so down. So I feel motivated to get good grades, to study while all of my other friends are going out partying. Just to succeed is my motivation.

Yes, I’m going to get through college.

Even though I had the worst grades [in high school], I just wanted to continue my education because I thought I had potential to be something….Even if it takes thirty years [to finish college], I’m going to do it. I don’t want to do it in that time, but that’s just how much I want to do it. That just shows that it’s something I’m willing to do.

During the data analysis, through the use of axial coding, the researcher discovered three properties of success, which are: FGC definitions of success, aspiration and determination. As shown above the property FGC definitions of success has four subcategories which categorize how FGC students define personal success (i.e., getting
good grades, graduation, happiness and helping others). The properties and subcategories identified in the third category are shown in Figure 3.

**Triangulation**

As defined by Denzin (1978) triangulation is “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon” (p.297). In this study triangulation was utilized as a means of cross referencing similar, yet different methods to ensure validation, accuracy, and a holistic portrayal of FGC student experiences. For this study in particular, the researcher focused on FGC students’ perception of success and their levels of self-efficacy. Denzin (1978) suggest there are four types of triangulation: (1) data, (2) investigator, (3) theoretical, and (4) methodological. The researcher used data triangulation which consists of information gathered from multiple data sources (i.e., the interviews, concept maps, and member-checking). In the event the triangulations reach the same conclusion, it will add validity to the study thus providing an explanation for the phenomenon of FGC experiences.

**Data Triangulation**

According to Denzin (1978) data triangulation is when a variety of data sources are used. In this study data triangulation was implemented as a means of decreasing the chances of bias usually associated with single method and theory approaches. The researcher used interviews, concept maps and member-checking to cross-check for reliability and consistency of the findings generated from the different data sources. According to Patton (1990), it is rare that triangulation of qualitative studies lead to single results. In the event that divergent results arise, although they differ, these findings
FGC Definitions Of Success
► Happiness
► Helping others
► Getting good grades
► Graduating from college

Success

Aspiration

Determination

Figure 3. Category Three: Success
can potentially enrich the study. Similarly, consistent patterns resulting from divergent data sources may also have significant contributions to the credibility of the study.

*Concept Maps*

Each participant in the study created a concept map in addition to their interviews. Some participants created their concept maps first, while others participated in the interview prior to creating their concept maps. Despite the variations in the process, the results of the concept maps were relatively consistent. As expressed in the interview data, students expressed how their family’s expectations of them stirred up a fear of failure. Conversely, their obligation to their families motivated them to strive to succeed. Additionally, because of the students’ responsibilities of work and school they expressed feeling as if they were lacking “college fun,” as it is experienced by typical college students. Participants also indicated feeling as if they were alone, and in some instances depressed.

*Member-Checking*

To test the trustworthiness of the data analysis the researcher implemented member-checking. Member-checking allowed the participants of the study to actively participate in the data analysis. Through member-checking the participants were able to read and provide feedback and/or comments regarding the researcher’s findings. Participants were presented the emerging categories, subcategories, properties and dimensions and given the opportunity to indicate whether or not the experiences of FGC students were accurately conveyed. Participants also provide clarification when and if needed. Member-checking occurred through follow-up phone calls and emails.
The results of the data triangulation (i.e., interviews, concept maps, and member-checking) showed a reoccurring theme of isolation and loneliness. However, the loneliness experienced by FGC students is unique. Typically college students express feelings of loneliness in the sense of homesickness; however, FGC students experience loneliness as a result of them not having a sense of belonging at school or at home. Their transition into college sets them apart from their families, yet their FGC status in college isolates them from the mainstream student body. This lack of belonging, as expressed by some participants, can lead to feelings of depression.

FGC students’ academic success seems to be significantly impacted by their families. Both the pressure and support displayed by their families motivates them to excel; however, it also places a great burden and pressure for the FGC student to succeed. From the onset these students were identified by their families, often by the parents, as the “special” one who had what it took to attend college, thus making the family proud. As a result, their fear of failing college and their families often lead to stress and sometimes anxiety for the FGC student.

Success as defined by the FGC students seemed to differ from the parents and the literature. According to parents, FGC students referred to success based on income and job employment. On the other hand, literature often relates success, academic in particular, to grade point average, grades and standardized test scores. FGC students’ definition of success, although inclusive of grades, was more so defined by their level of happiness, degree attainment and helping others.
**Self-Efficacy Theory**

According to Bandura, there are four processes of self-efficacy theory. It is these processes that determine whether one is perceived to have low or high levels of self-efficacy. In an attempt to determine the self-efficacy of FGC students the researcher has applied these processes to the responses of the FGC students who participated in the study. These responses, as seen below, suggest that FGC students have higher levels of self-efficacy and that these levels contribute to their overall academic and social success.

*Cognitive Process*

The cognitive process suggests that a human’s purposeful behavior begins with thoughts of a goal in mind (Bandura, 1997). Most, if not all, of the participants in this study reported that they have always wanted to attend college. Ironically, many of the FGC students perceived college as the most realistic next step in life following the completion of high school. The desire and pursuit of college demonstrate that higher levels of efficacy are present. Below are examples that reflect the cognitive processes of FGC students:

P.1 I’ve always had a desire to learn, you know, to go on to higher education. I had dreams that went beyond the high school diploma level.

P.5 Well, growing up I always wanted to go to school, like beyond high school. I don’t think there was ever a doubt in my mind that I wasn’t going to go. It was always just a matter of where I was going to go.

P.7 I’ve always known that I wanted to go to college. There was never a doubt that I didn’t want to go to college.
Motivational Process

The motivational process of self-efficacy theory suggests that one’s thoughts motivate and guide their actions (Bandura, 1997). The FGC students in this study seemed to be very cognizant and aware that they, unlike the other members of their families, were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to go to college. Consequently, their obligation to their family motivates them to complete their education despite the obstacles and challenges they face. For FGC students, their success is not just a personal accomplishment; it is also a means of paving the way for others (i.e., siblings, cousins, community members) to obtain an education, too. Below are examples that reflect participant’s motivational processes:

P.2  I think I’m motivated in school a lot by my family and my own expectations of myself. I have high expectations of myself.

P.6  Opposition such as where I come from, and being a minority really fuels me to do better because I don’t feel like anyone is better than me. I want to show other minorities and other women that they can do whatever they want. So I think that drives me—the opposition drives me more.

P.7  I will find some way no matter what to complete it [my degree]. If I can’t financially do it—student loans. I can’t imagine not finishing school. It’s not even a thought in my head. I hate it when I don’t succeed. I just get so down. So I feel motivated to get good grades, to study while all of my other friends are going out partying. Just to succeed is my motivation.

Affective Process

In the affective process it is implied that one’s coping skills affect the stress, depression and motivation that individuals experience when they are engulfed in situations that they find difficult and challenging (Bandura, 1997). Some examples of the
possible challenges that FGC students face are: financial difficulties, loneliness, isolation, balancing work and school, adapting to the college environment, lack of academic preparation and the stress of having to live up to their families’ expectations. As a result of these stressors and challenges, FGC students’ levels of self-efficacy propel them to either become more motivated or more anxious. Those who become more motivated, as demonstrated in this study, exemplify those students who have higher levels of self-efficacy. Below are examples that show the affective process of FGC student participants:

P.2  Last year I avoided 'going out' as a general rule, so I spent more time studying. Now I'm learning to balance.

P.3  I have definitely renewed my relationship with God while I’ve been here because when I got here I didn’t have any friends so I didn’t have a choice. It was just me and my room and my Bible.

P.8  I talk to professors, and I would get as much information about what I needed to do in college because I was undecided my first year. Everything has been a brick wall after brick wall. It’s like “boom” stop, but you have to find some way over it.

Selection Processes

The selection process suggests that one’s self-efficacy beliefs shape and influence the types of activities and environments that individuals select. Additionally, Bandura’s self-efficacy theory implies that as one masters an experience the level of efficacy increases and the individual then begins to set higher goals (Bandura, 1997). At least three of the ten participants reported having positive experiences in Upward Bound, a college preparatory program, which allowed them to explore and strengthen their academic potential. Most of the FGC participants in this study also reported always
having an aspiration to attend college. Some examples that show the selective process of FGC students are:

P.1 We all have a purpose in life and I’d rather at least—even if I was to fail at what I want to do—just the experience of trying to grow and progress to something bigger and better than what I expected is more fulfilling than not even trying at all.

P.5 Accomplishing your goals—setting goals that aren’t easily accomplished, but aren’t too difficult to accomplish—and accomplishing them. Then setting new goals and accomplishing them.

P.6 The programs that my father put me in…they always taught me that you can do what you want. You have control. You can accomplish the goals that you have for yourself. So I’ve never really been in a place where I didn’t feel like I couldn’t do it. I really don’t consider failure as an option.

Based upon students’ responses, as it relates to self-efficacy theory, one can conclude that the participants in this study had higher levels of self-efficacy. As seen in Bandura’s (1994) Self-Efficacy Theory, parents are very influential in their child’s academic success. The parents of FGC students verbalized and modeled the possible outcome for students should they not attend college. As a result of their parents’ experiences, belief in the students’ potential and support of education, participants realized that education was a realistic and attainable goal for them. Therefore, participants set college and graduation as goals.

Despite the challenges (i.e., funding their education, isolation, and learning the college environment) once on campus FGC students find the resources and acquire the coping skills (i.e., loans, work, other FGC friends, spirituality, involvement in student organizations and intrinsic motivation) needed to survive in college. Each quarter that the
students do well in classes and is able to meet their financial obligations (i.e., Bandura’s “mastery experiences”), their self-efficacy increases and they become more determined to graduate despite the length of time that it takes and the challenges they may endure. As the FGC students get closer to reaching their goal of graduation, many of the FGC students begin to set more challenging goals (i.e., attending graduate school).

*Emergent Grounded Theory*

As evident by the data triangulation and application of self-efficacy theory, the research concludes that as the categories of family and transitional issues positively increase so does the category of success. The greater the success, the higher the level of FGC student self-efficacy. In essence, the experience of FGC students becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. This phenomenon is shown in the emergent theory, *interconnections of self-efficacy phases*, seen in figure 4.

The emergent theory, *interconnections of self-efficacy phases*, denotes the self-efficacy processes (i.e., family, transitional issues, and success) that FGC students go through in order to achieve academic and social success. The success attainment of FGC students is directly linked to their level of achievement. This theory demonstrates how FGC parents select the child (ren) who they feel has the potential to go on to college. From the onset students are presented with the idea that college is a realistic goal. After observing their parents’ stress, work dissatisfaction and financial woes, they begin to set goals for themselves as an attempt to make their lives different from their parents. Hence, the cognitive process of FGC students’ self-efficacy begins as students set the goal of going to college.
As previously stated, the FGC participants in this study defined their attainment of personal success as evidenced by good grades, happiness, graduating from college and helping others. Conversely, their parents often view success as having a good job and making enough money so that they can support their family. Granted the parents’ perspective of success was initially one that is embraced by the FGC student. However, as FGC students progress and transition through academia a paradigm shift occurs. What was initially viewed as a challenge (i.e., college) is now viewed as an opportunity.

The family of FGC students plays a very significant role in the beliefs, ideas and perspectives of FGC students. The family process of the interconnections of self-efficacy phases connects to the motivational process of self-efficacy. As FGC students transition into and through college many of them receive constant affirmation and encouragement from their families and communities. This not only gives them the motivation to propel forward, but it also emphasizes the significance of their FGC status. As the student embraces the responsibility of being the first in the family to go to college, the stress and pressure to succeed becomes more intense and seemingly irreversible. Despite this heavy burden to succeed, because the family believes the FGC student has the potential to be successful he or she begins to believe it, too.

With the decision to choose to be the FGC student in your family a student brings about many transitional issues that often pose as challenges and obstacles. The transitional issues process of the interconnections of self-efficacy phases interchangeably connects to the motivational, affective and selection processes of the FGC students self-efficacy. Due to the complexity and variation in the transitional issues
process, it is likely that not all FGC students will transition in the same way or time. The variation in the transition experience is contingent upon the variations in their previous college knowledge, finances, exposure and preparation, adaptation and ability to balance their responsibilities and multiple identities.

Unlike most students who experience homesickness, FGC students experience feelings of isolation and marginalization. They struggle to maintain commitment to their families; however the very thing they aspire to have (i.e., a college education) is the one thing that makes a distinction between them and their family. Consequently, although they are still accepted by the family, they no longer “fit” the family norms. On the other hand, while in college FGC students find themselves in college environments that are not socially and culturally welcoming. They typically do not come to college already having friends. Furthermore, they are often unaware of the other FGC students who are also enrolled at the university. Hence the isolation and marginalization that FGC students experience typically leads to feelings of loneliness and frustration. Depending on the student and their level of self-efficacy, these challenges can either stifle or motivate the progress the student makes toward the academic goal of graduating from college.

Most often; however, because of the FGC student’s lack of preparation and lack of accurate knowledge about college it takes FGC students a longer time than their non-FGC peers to identify and utilize the resources available to help them overcome these transitional challenges (i.e., tutoring services, counseling services, academic advising, financial aid scholarships and loans). In the meantime, FGC students regularly struggle with finding funding to pay for their college expenses (i.e., tuition, room and board) all
while also trying to study in between other time commitments (i.e., work and student organizations). Over time those FGC students with higher levels of self-efficacy manage to find ways of coping with this ongoing stress (i.e., making friends, connecting with faculty, gaining employment, getting involved with student organization) and maintaining their enrollment in college by connecting with the university. This connectedness increases their sense of belonging and expands their support system beyond that of their family. As stated in the literature FGC students who do not acquire a connectedness with the university community are less likely to stay enrolled and more apt to have lower levels of self-efficacy.

Those students who continue to endure and persevere despite their present circumstances are more committed and determined to complete their degree. Ironically, despite their moments of doubt and frustration, FGC students with higher levels of self-efficacy do not see “failing” as an option. Instead, their “fear of failure” becomes a desire for academic and social success. This process of success is interconnected with their future selection process, thus once again triggering the cognitive process of their self-efficacy. For FGC students, their continuous enrollment in college reaffirms their college potential and is a means of survival. Not only are they striving to earn their college degree but they are also striving to make life better for themselves and those within their sphere of influence (i.e., siblings, cousins, members of the community). Thus ultimately resulting in them completing their college degrees despite the time it takes and the challenges they may encounter. As a result, these highly efficacious FGC students then set higher academic goals for themselves (i.e., graduate school).
Although in sometimes inconsistent ways, FGC students experience and transition through Bandura’s self-efficacy processes (1997) as they matriculate through college. The phases and interconnections of FGC student experiences were devised into three categories. As a means of conveying their experiences, the three categories family, transitional issues and success were incorporated into this one emergent theory, interconnections of self-efficacy phases. On a continual basis, FGC students were influenced by their families and external stressors (i.e., financing college, making new friends, acquiring good grades, meeting familial expectations). Their personal goals, motivation and acquisition of coping skills earmark significant transformations in their self-efficacy development. As FGC students embraced their challenges (i.e., lack of preparation, pressure to succeed, finances) they developed coping skills (i.e., meeting with professors for assistance, obtaining employment, involvement in student organizations) which aided in their academic survival. This survival (i.e., earning good grades, paying for tuition and making new friends) gives them a sense of accomplishment which motivates them to continue to pursue their main goal (i.e., graduating from college) and set higher goals, which leads to higher levels of success attainment as well as higher levels of self-efficacy.
Success ► FGC definitions of success ► Determination

Family
► Influence in choices
► Parental perception of education
► Expectations
► Pressure to succeed
► Support

Transitional Issues
► College Knowledge
► Exposure & Preparation
► Finances
► Adaptation
► Balancing Responsibilities

Interconnections of Self-Efficacy Phases

Figure 4. Emergent Grounded Theory: Interconnections of Success Predictors
Conclusion

As previously stated, interviews were conducted and concept maps were created by ten traditional-aged FGC students. As a result of the data analysis, three categories emerged: family, transitional issues, and success. These three emergent categories described reflect FGC students’ perspectives of their experience as they transition into and matriculate through postsecondary education. Additionally, participants in the study were given the opportunity to define success from their own perspective.

Data triangulation was also used to add validity to the emergent theory. During the interviews consistent themes such as finances, family expectations, lack of college knowledge, lack of preparation, family support, and pressure to succeed continued to reoccur among the participants. As a result of the data triangulation, additional themes that were not as prevalent in the interviews presented greater significance when cross-checked with the concept maps and member-checking. These emergent themes include loneliness, fear of failure, and marginalization.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This qualitative study explored how self-efficacy affects the academic and social success of FGC students. The researcher also sought to find out how FGC students define their personal success. Ten full-time FGC students were interviewed. In addition to the interviews, additional information about the participants was collected through demographic questionnaires, concept maps, phone calls and email correspondence. A grounded theory approach was employed to investigate the experiences of FGC students. After careful review of the participants’ transcriptions, categories emerged and participants’ quotes were provided as supporting evidence. The three emerging categories that reflected students’ perspectives of their experiences as FGC students in pursuit of a postsecondary education were: family, transitional issues, and success.

The purpose of this study was to allow FGC students to express and explain their experiences and perceptions of their personal success from their perspective. The researcher is unaware of any other studies that have explored FGC students’ success from their perspective. Given the constant rise in FGC student enrollment, this research serves to aid mental health counselors, high school and college in particular, in increasing their awareness of the issues and experiences that FGC students encounter while transitioning into and attending college.

Many factors contribute to the self-efficacy and overall success of FGC students. This chapter seeks to add greater depth to what the researcher has already shown regarding the experiences of FGC students. Due to the limitations of this study the
emerging grounded theory that is proposed is an exploratory theory that will require further exploration and modification. Figure 4 illustrates this proposed grounded theory.

**Emerging Grounded Theory of the Self-Efficacy of FGC Students**

Throughout the study the three categories *family, transitional issues, and success* continued to emerge in the response of participants. Students voluntarily shared their reflections of their experiences as FGC students. These experiences encompassed in the categories reveal the factors that impact and predict the academic success and self-efficacy of FGC students. These identified categories continuously play a significant role in the lives of FGC students as they strive to be the first in their families to attain the ultimate long-term goal of academic achievement: a college degree.

**Family**

*Family* emerged as a significant category. The participants’ decisions to go to college seem to be heavily influenced by their familial influences. It was through the experiences of their parents that FGC students seem to gain insight into the significance of education. Therefore for FGC students their decision to go to college did not seem to be a decision at all, instead it was perceived as the next viable step to obtain what they considered to be success. Additionally, it was seen as the only way to avoid encountering the same dissatisfaction with employment and life as what had been verbalized and modeled by their parents.

FGC students carry a heavy burden consisting of family expectations, community expectations and self-expectations. This venture to go on to college, although experienced by just the student, is seen as a “family affair.” The student faces the
pressure of having to excel in college for fear of disappointing and failing their families. For reasons unknown to the researcher, the FGC student is often identified and purposefully selected by the family as the one that has the academic potential to transcend their family’s future beyond that of a high school education. This pressure to succeed often causes motivation or anxiety within the student.

In exchange for FGC students’ willingness to fulfill their families’ expectations of them going to college, they receive ongoing familial support that cultivates their aspirations and determination to fulfill their goal of attaining a degree. Unlike the typical student, most of the participants in this study reported their families were unable to offer financial support. Therefore it was not expected by the student. Conversely, participants recalled experiences in which their families generously provided them with other forms of support. Some examples of the support include, but are not limited to special meals when visiting home, emotional support when feeling doubtful and defeated, as well as encouragement to continue to strive to do their personal best.

For a FGC student, going to college is a huge undertaking that conveys monumental significance. Not only does it allow the student to achieve success, but it also renders an opportunity for others within the family and community to follow. FGC students purposefully pursue college with the hopes of positively influencing other members of their family and community to do the same.

*Transitional Issues*

*Transitional issues* was another important category that emerged from the data.
Unlike the typical college student, FGC students are unique in the sense that they are a part of two distinctly different environments: home and college. However, the FGC student does not have a sense of “belonging” in either one. Students’ FGC identity often creates a barrier that distinguishes them from their families and peers at home, as well as their peers in college. Consequently, they find themselves in a place of uncertainty and loneliness.

Additionally, participants in the study reported having limited resources at their disposal to assist in their academic transition. This lack of resources often resulted in feelings of frustration, doubt, ambiguity and feeling of being overwhelmed. Some of the resources in which students lacked were: financial, college admissions preparation and knowledge about the college environment as a whole.

After much trial and error students seem to acquire the skills and/or learn ways of accommodating for the differences that were present among them and their non-FGC peers. Some of the participants reported “feeling old” and as if they have not been privy of the opportunity to “experience college” like their non-FGC peers. Due to the pressures of their family expectation and their financial pressures of paying for college, FGC students expressed feeling obligated to work and study to alleviate these stressors and increase their chances of academic achievement. Nonetheless, as FGC students progress through college the academic and social differences between them and their peers seem to decrease.
Success

The final category to emerge was **success**. Based on the definitions success can be defined as the sense of fulfillment one derives from attaining a goal. In most cases researchers defines students’ success based on their grade point average and standardized test scores. When participants of the study were asked to define success reoccurring themes such as good grades, graduation, happiness and helping others emerged.

The mere pursuit of an education and the increased improvement in their grades increases their motivation and determination to succeed. Consequently, as the probability of them obtaining their degree increases there is a similar reaction and pattern that occurs with their level of self-efficacy perception of personal success. The FGC student accomplishments then give life and hope to those who mean the most to them: their family.

**Implications for Counselors**

The role of counselors, in high school and college, is to provide mental health, guidance and adjustment services to the student. Based on the data gathered in this study FGC students are at a greater disadvantage than their non-FGC peers, especially as it relates to their transition into college. Although similar in their academic pursuits, FGC students are shaped more so by their social circumstances than their non-FGC peers.

This study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the FGC student, thus indicating the significance of the role counselor’s play in shaping and molding the academic and social development of a FGC student. This study stems from true-life experiences and makes a concise effort at uncovering those personal and delicate issues
which illuminate the particular orientation, aspirations and thought processes of the FGC student. This study concurs with current literature that suggests FGC student experiences are unique in nature, which emphasizes the significances of the role of counselors and higher education professionals.

Due to the nature of circumstances (i.e., lack of finances, lack of connection with the college, cultural variances, and multiple responsibilities), FGC students’ needs for mental health, guidance and adjustment services seem to be greatest as they are transitioning from high school to college. Based on the role of a high school counselor he or she is in the position to best equip students with a greater wealth of knowledge about college. For example, counselors can implement a college introductory course for juniors and seniors, thus helping students to select college, prepare for the standardized achievement test (SAT), offer education on funding sources and college visits. In doing so, counselors would foster and promote academic success in FGC students.

This study has shown that family plays a significant and influential role in the lives of FGC students. Most of the FGC students in this study implied expressed how their parents expected them to go to college, yet, in some instances the parents were limited in their knowledge of college as well as the support (i.e., financial) they could offer. Therefore, it is imperative that counselors begin to have a more holistic and inclusive approach to counseling when working with FGC students which entails including the parents and guardians of FGC students in the education process (i.e., on site FAFSA assistance). Not only will this education expand the limited knowledge FGC parents have about college, but it will also strengthen the family support for the student.
Once enrolled in college, there arises another set of issues for FGC students. As mentioned previously, FGC students experience feelings of isolation, marginalization, anxiety and depression. As a means of addressing these issues college counselors can offer support groups, especially for FGC students. In doing so, counselors will increase the peer support for FGC students, thus making them aware of other FGC students who are on the college campus. In addition, the connectedness that students will experience through these support groups will not only address the students’ mental health issues but it will also promote a sense of belonging, thus increasing the retention of FGC students. In doing so, counselors will foster and support the overall mental health and well-being of FGC students.

Similarly, student affair professionals can also contribute to the success and smooth transition of FGC students into college. By connecting with students early in their academic careers student affair professionals can increase student involvement and level of connectedness with the institution. For example, FIG’s (freshman interest groups) can be created for FGC students in particular. Due to the small cohort in FIG’s and the simplicity of course registration, if implemented for FGC students, it would decrease students’ anxiety and promote peer and faculty connections. This would also allow students to be introduced to college at a slower process. Likewise, freshman or transfer student orientations can be implemented or geared towards students who are of FGC status. This will allow FGC students and their families to gain information about college (i.e., financial aid, registration, campus resources) in greater depth. Additionally, this will also allow FGC students the opportunity to meet some of their FGC peers and begin
building peer relationships at the onset of college. This early contact could potentially prevent and decrease FGC students’ anxiety, frustration, loneliness, and dropout rates.

Due to the increase in FGC enrollment it is imperative that higher education professionals, such as professors, gain an increased awareness of the presence of FGC students in their classes, as well as the obstacles and challenges that they encounter. As shown in research, FGC students are often ethnic minority students who seldom see their views and perspectives presented in the classrooms. In order to combat these feelings of isolation and marginalization, professors should promote inclusion and acceptance. For example, professors can infuse differing cultural views, teachings and perspectives in their courses. In doing so, professors would make a significant contribution to the quality of student education and the overall college environment. Additionally, because FGC students lack college knowledge, professors can place greater emphasis on academic advising. This would strengthen the faculty-student connectedness and would increase FGC students’ knowledge of the matriculation process, thus increasing their chances of academic success.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study is one of the few that has been conducted with FGC students at a predominantly white four-year institution. Additionally, it is one of the few to provide the perspective of the student. Although this study included a relatively diverse sample of participants this sample did not include Latino students nor was it representative of the Ohio University student body. This study focused solely on the experiences of traditional-aged college students (18 to 24 years of age). Therefore this study was unable
to capture the experiences of non-traditional FGC students. Although this study aimed to explore the social and academic aspects of FGC self-efficacy, the questions and data from the study did not lend itself to addressing the social component of self-efficacy. Due to me working in a position of authority at Ohio University, it is quite possible that this may have limited the social desirability of the study resulting in limited responses from participants. This study was qualitative in nature; therefore, the data gathered cannot be generalized. Due to time allotted to conduct this study the researcher was limited to conducting one round of interviews with participants. Had the researcher had more time a focus group or second round of interviews would have added more validity to the study and allowed an opportunity for other significant, yet less prominent issues to be addressed (i.e., culture and race).

Recommendations for Future Research

Although research has been conducted on FGC students because they are such a unique and diverse student population, much more research is needed. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the researcher suggests that future counselor education research be conducted to expand our understanding of FGC student experiences.

As mentioned previously, identity and culture also seem to relate to the experiences of FGC students. In lieu of the data triangulation that has already been conducted the researcher suggests that future studies employ theoretical triangulation. According to Denzin (1978) theoretical triangulation requires the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a set of data. For future studies it would be worth conducting a

This research was conducted at a four year institution, yet most research (Inman & Mayes, 1999; Kojaku & Nunez 1998; Striplin, 1999) reports on the experiences of FGC students who attend community colleges. Further research also suggests that students who attend 2-year colleges are more likely to withdrawal from college than those who attend 4-year institutions. Therefore, one might explore the self-efficacy of FGC students who attend community colleges and how it relates to their level of self-efficacy, thus identifying ways in which it possibly impacts FGC student retention. Similarly a study comparing the self-efficacy of FGC students at 2-year and 4-year institutions can be conducted.

Based on the results of the data analysis and triangulation (i.e., interviews, concept maps, and member-checking) it is evident that FGC students are prone to experiencing mental health and adjustment issues. These issues often manifest in the form of loneliness, isolation, anxiety and depression. However, because FGC students are seldom aware of the resources available to them it is possible that out of the college student population FGC students would be less likely to seek out counseling services to help with them deal with their mental health and adjustment issues. Therefore, counseling professionals may benefit from further exploration of issues experienced by
FGC students as this, too, may contribute to the academic achievement and retention of FGC students.

Although this study focused on traditional-aged students, there is still more to be revealed about the experiences of non-traditional FGC students. Many researchers report that most FGC students are non-traditional; however, no research thus far has compared the experiences of non-traditional and traditional FGC students. This researcher suggests that future research be conducted to compare the experiences of non-traditional and traditional FGC students. In doing so, overlapping experiences will be identified. Similarly, institutions will come to learn what resources, programs and support services contribute to student satisfaction, retention and academic success.

As shown in this study there are some FGC students who aspire to go on to graduate school, yet little is known about FGC graduate students. Based on the experiences of undergraduate FGC students it is likely that FGC students also encounter similar, yet different challenges and obstacles at the graduate level. Therefore this researcher feels that further research is needed to determine when and how FGC students transition into graduate school after completing their bachelor’s degrees.

This study explored the experiences contributing to the self-efficacy of FGC students who differed in academic standing. Based on the data, most FGC students suggest that transitioning into college tends to be their greatest challenge. However, at some point FGC students develop coping skills and are able to academically perform equally to their non-FGC peers. Therefore, this body of literature could benefit from a longitudinal study, looking at the experiences of FGC students from the time that they are
enrolled in postsecondary education until the time they graduate. This will allow the points of transition to be identified and the experiences to be explored in greater depth.

**Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, this researcher concurs with previous research that suggests that FGC students are at disadvantage when compared to their peers. This is particularly applicable when referring to FGC students’ transition from high school to college. As a result we can imply that these are the areas in which counseling services can be most helpful. However, we would be remiss if we did not also acknowledge the strong suit of FGC students, too.

Based on the data from this study, FGC students have shown themselves to be very driven and motivated to succeed at higher levels of academia. Additionally, they not only have the motivation but they also, once given time, demonstrate the academic potential otherwise overlooked. FGC students are a multifaceted in the roles in which they play and are unique in the ways in which the overcome adversities. Given that future research occurs, more FGC academic potential and survival skills will potentially be revealed.
REFERENCES


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greater risk for attrition than their peers? Research in rural education. 6, 31–34.


Ting, S. R. (1998). Predicting first-year grades and academic progress of college students


APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

The following research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University for the period listed below. This review was conducted through an expedited review procedure as defined in the federal regulations as Category(ies):

Project Title: The Self-Efficacy of First-Generation College Students

Researcher(s): Dawn Jenkins

Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Dana Levitt
Department: Counseling and Higher Education

Jeff Vancouver, Ph.D., Chair
Institutional Review Board

Approval Date 08/16/07
Expiration Date 08/15/08

This approval is valid until expiration date listed above. If you wish to continue beyond expiration date, you must submit a periodic review application and obtain approval prior to continuation.

Adverse events must be reported to the IRB promptly, within 5 working days of the occurrence.

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Research: Factors Related to First-Generation College Students Experiences
Principal Investigator: Dawn Jenkins
Co-Investigator: N/A
Department: Counseling & Higher Education

Federal and university regulations require signed consent for participation in research involving human subjects. After reading the statements below, please indicate your consent by signing this form.

EXPLANATION OF STUDY

I am conducting a study on the experiences of first-generation college (FGC) students at Ohio University. This research will explore the factors that relate to first-generation college students experiences while pursuing a bachelors degrees. This research aims to get a student’s perspective of his or her experiences and factors that contribute to one’s academic success beyond the traditional predictors, such as standardized tests and grade point average (GPA). This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my doctoral degree.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be: (1) asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, (2) interviewed and (3) asked to create a concept map. A concept map is a diagram that shows the relationships among concepts. For this study the concepts will be the thoughts, feelings and experiences that you have had as a result of being a first-generation college student. The concepts are then connected with lines, in a downward-branching hierarchical structure. The relationship between these concepts will be linked with phrases that explain how the two (or more) experiences relate. The concept map will serve as a visual representation of your experiences as a first-generation college student.

This study should take approximately 1 hour. However, please note, should new findings emerge as a result of our initial interview you may be asked to continue participation in the study.

Risks and Discomforts

There might be discomfort as you discuss your experiences and history of getting into college. Should this occur you be provided with a list of campus resources (e.g., tutoring services, counseling services, disability services, etc.) at the time of the interview. Your participation in this study is anonymous and voluntary; hence, you may discontinue your participation in this study at any time without penalty. Should you decide to discontinue, any data previously collected will be destroyed.


Benefits

As a result of your participation, you may gain personal insight during the interview process. Additionally, overall, your participation will assist me in providing higher education faculty/administrators and mental health counselors with a better understanding of the anxieties, stressors, cultural, familial, social, financial, and academic challenges that FGC students experience as they matriculate through college. Additionally, educators and mental health professionals will gain insight into the self-efficacy beliefs of first-generation college students.

Confidentiality and Records

Your responses will remain confidential, so please answer as honestly as you can. You will not be asked to put names on demographic forms. Instead, a code will be used connect the demographic information with the interview data. This information will remain confidential and at no time will a master list will be maintained. The interviews will be recorded on a digital recorder and saved to a CD, which will then be locked in a file drawer in my office. Only my advisor and I will have access to these interviews. Documents will be destroyed when my dissertation has been approved.

Compensation

No compensation for participation will be provided.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact:

Dawn Jenkins (Researcher): jenkinsd@ohio.edu or 707-9535
Dr. Dana Levitt (Advisor): levitt@ohio.edu or 593-4163

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

I certify that I have read and understand this consent form and agree to participate as a subject in the research described. I agree that known risks to me have been explained to my satisfaction and I understand that no compensation is available from Ohio University and its employees for any injury resulting from my participation in this research. I certify that I am 18 years of age or older. My participation in this research is given voluntarily. I understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled. I certify that I have been given a copy of this consent form to take with me.
APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questions are important to the outcome of this research project. Please answer all of the following questions to the best of your knowledge. Your answers will be kept confidential.

Please read the questions and circle all answers that apply to you:

1. Sex: Male Female

2. Age: _________ (years)

3. Your current accumulative GPA: 2.00 and below
   2.01 - 2.49
   2.50 - 2.99
   3.00 - 3.49
   3.50 - 4.00

4. Current Academic Standing: Freshman
   Sophomore
   Junior
   Senior

5. Enrollment Status Full-time
   Part-time

6. Number of credit hours completed: __________

7. Marital status: Married
   Single, Divorced
   Widowed
   Single, Never been married

8. Race/Ethnicity Caucasian
   African American
   Latino/Hispanic
   Native American
   Asian American
   Other: ________________________
9. School Funding:
   - Family (Parents/Guardians)
   - Family (Spouse)
   - Scholarships (Need based)
   - Scholarships (Merit Based)
   - Grants
   - Loans
   - Employment/Work
   - Other: ______________________

10. Employment Status:
   - Full-Time (40+ hours/week)
   - Part-Time (20 hours or less/week)
   - Not Employeed

11. Other Commitments (not school related):
   - Spouse
   - Family (Parents/Siblings)
   - Children
   - Student Organizations
   - Volunteering
   - Other: __________________

12. Father’s Highest Level of Education:
   - Elementary School
   - Middle School
   - High School
   - Bachelors Degree
   - Post Bachelorrette Degree

13. Mother’s Highest Level of Education:
   - Elementary School
   - Middle School
   - High School
   - Bachelors Degree
   - Post Bachelorrette Degreee

Thank you for completing this questionnaire!
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your decision to go to college.
2. What things or people influenced your decision to go to college?
3. What were/are your expectations of college?
4. What are your vocational or career goals?
5. What shaped your vocational or career goals?
6. Who has had the greatest impact on who you have become, and why?
7. What are your family’s beliefs about education?
8. What motivates you and why?
9. Please describe a time when you felt supported.
10. How do you think your college experience has differed from students who are non-first generation college students?
11. On a scale of one to five, how likely are you to complete your undergraduate degree (1=least likely, 2=somewhat likely, 3= unsure, 4= likely, 5= most likely)?
12. In general on a scale of one to five with one being the least and ten being the greatest (1=no belief, 2=little belief, 3=some belief, 4= much belief, 5=absolute belief), how would you rate your belief in your ability to accomplish a goal or task that you’ve set for yourself?
13. How would you define success? Is this your definition or others?
14. How would you describe your success at Ohio University?
15. What 2-3 things have impacted your belief in your ability to accomplish a set goal or task?

16. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about being a first-generation college student?
APPENDIX E: DIRECTIONS FOR CONCEPT MAPPING

The Thoughts, Feelings and Experiences of First-Generation College Students

Directions:

1. Begin with the topic “First Generation College Students”, also referred to as FGC.

2. Think about your key concepts thoughts, feelings, experiences related to being a FGC student.

3. Write each concept on a piece of post-it paper.

4. Avoid using sentences. The concepts should be 1-3 words.

5. Organize or rank them on the big paper in order from the most impactful to the least impactful.

6. Draw lines between concepts that are related in significant and useful ways.
Thank you for your time and participation in this research study!

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your participation in my study, entitled “The Self-Efficacy of First-Generation College Students”. Without your assistance, the completion of the research would not have been possible.

This research has been focused on the experiences of first-generation college students. As part of the research you were (1) asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, (2) interviewed and (3) asked to create a concept map.

Please know that the information that you provided in this study is anonymous and confidential. No data will be reported that could personally identify you with any information given in the research material. Only my dissertation chair and I will have access to the research data.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this research or if you would like to receive a copy of the results. Again, I would like to thank you for time and participation. It is most appreciated.

Sincerely,

Dawn Jenkins
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Counseling and Higher Education
APPENDIX G: TRANSCRIPTIONS

Interview 1

D: Can you tell me about your decision to go to college?

P1: I’ve always had a desire to learn, you know, to go on to higher education. I had dreams that went beyond the high school diploma level. So it kind of forced me to go into college.

D: What things or people influenced your decision to go to college?

P1: I would have to say the career I chose in general. What it was like in the field—I had a little bit if experience so it taught me to desire it [college] more, actually being [there]and seeing what it was like in the field.

D: What were/are your expectations of college?

P1: I would say that my expectations were pretty much for a growing experience—becoming an adult, doing stuff on your own. Honestly, it wasn’t too tough. I’ve done that pretty much all my life. It was easy to get into; just a lot more funding was required. But besides the financial aspect, you have to mature when you get to college. There are a lot more opportunities and diverse cultures that I had never been exposed to before.

D: What are your potential career goals?

P1: I plan to become a family practitioner or a family practice physician. I would really love to be a physician.

D: Very nice. What would you say has shaped your career goals?

P1: Again, I think it has been more the experience. I’ve looked into a lot of careers, and some of them didn’t suit me as well as I thought they would have. Coming into college—that was my major, pre-medicine- so that I could pursue a degree instead of testing the waters.

D: When did you first become introduced to that?

P1: To the pre-medicine?

D: Yes

P1: I have to say when I was eleven. At first it was just something. That’s always what they compare—when I grow up I want to be a firefighter, lawyer, doctor. Well, maybe a
doctor. But then it didn’t really shape until I had seen a lot of things behind the scenes. That’s what happened with my personal doctors. I had a special interest in what they were doing so I would always ask questions. I’m very inquisitive.

D: I would say so. Who has had the greatest impact on who you have become and why?

P1: That’s a tough one. Well, this is really difficult, but if I had to choose who, I would say it was my uncle because he had his high school diploma and he was going to the community college back home. He struggled and always told me, “I want you to do better. I’ve always wanted to do this with my life, but I sort of strayed away. Now I’m coming back and it’s a lot harder.” I guess he pushed me to do it.

D: Now is there a “what” also?

P1: That pushed me to do it?

D: Yes, because it sounded like you meant there might be more reasons as well then just an individual.

P1: Yeah, I was thinking more toward more individuals, but if it was an actual thing that pushed me to do it, I would probably say family pride. This whole study is about first generation students and no one in my immediate family has ever graduated from any accredited college or university. Even though I wasn’t the first [one to go to college] of any of my cousins; I guess I was still the one that was destined to go to college.

D: What are your family’s beliefs about education?

P1: They all push toward higher education in every means.

D: Can you give me some examples, like maybe things that they say or ways in which they really encourage education?

P1: It’s just like the same with a lot of parents, at least in the African American community: I always want my children to do better than me so I will do the best that I can so that they can progress in life more than what I have. It was more like that. Of course the older generation, my grandparents, they talk about how they fought so hard to have schooling. They will never let me take it for granted because of how hard they fought for it.

D: What motivates you and why?

P1: I guess I have to say that we all have a purpose in life and I’d rather at least—even if I was to fail at what I want to do—just the experience of trying to grow and progress to
something bigger and better than what I expected is more fulfilling than not even trying at all.

D: Can you describe a time when you felt supported?

P1: Definitely high school graduation. I wasn’t in the top five percent. I wasn’t the one to get all the scholarships or awards for being the brightest. But all throughout high school I always worked hard—very diligent—and I guess it all became prominent when I walked across the stage to receive my diploma. In high school I was voted most likely to succeed. So it was very encouraging to know it wasn’t just my family there, but also my peers.

D: How do you think your college experience as a first generation college student has differed from students who are not first generation college students?

P1: I would say on many levels it’s different because if you are a first year you are obviously not as prepared as you could be.

D: If you are or aren’t?

P1: If you are a first generation, you are not as prepared as those who are not.

D: In what ways?

P1: In any aspect. You know, a lot of people go by the financial and that’s true too. If you already know what to expect from the college environment—about how financial aid works, how to receive money, how scholarships are awarded, things of that nature—if you know the whole process of how that works then it is a lot easier to say we can afford for you to go to college. We can send you there with no worries of struggling. The mental, emotional and motivational support is very different. If you are not a first generation student then you have others to look up to to say, “I’ve done it, you can go through it, it’s ok. That’s how it goes.” But if you are not a first year you can’t have anyone to say that’s just how it goes, you’ll get through it, you’re alright. Instead it’s all you are doing better than we can and that’s all we can expect. So it’s a very different feel.

D: On a scale of 1-5 with one being least likely and five being definitely, how likely are you to complete your undergraduate degree?

P1: I would love to say a four. I mean as far as in my degree, I would love to say a four.

D: In general on a scale of one to five, how do you rate your self-efficacy, and your self-efficacy is how you rate your beliefs in your ability to do whatever it is you set out to do? And one would be absolutely no belief, two little, three some, four much, five total belief.

P1: Five.
D: Is there anything else that you’d like to tell me about your experience as a first generation college student that maybe I didn’t ask for or that you think would be important that you would like to share?

P1: I guess I would have to say that it’s not just the parents or the family’s position to help move people toward college. Sometimes the school systems don’t push first years toward doing it.

D: Are there any other parties that you feel that are instrumental or that could help. I find that it’s not just the parents or family’s responsibility, but also the individuals that work in the high school. Is there anyone else you think could contribute or is responsible?

P1: I think it’s also the neighborhood in general. If you’ve done something, work, anything as far as obtaining a degree, even an associate’s degree, and you don’t explain to the individuals and the children around you that they can at least strive for something better than they will never have the desire to want to strive for something better.

D: How are you received in the community now that you are in college?

P1: It is overwhelming, but in a good way. But there are times when you get a little frustrated or flustered because if you’ve come back as I did, for instance, after fall quarter—I did terrible fall quarter. I was a first generation, no experience, had no idea what I was getting into: I bombed fall quarter. When I came back it was very demeaning to come back and see that people put their faith and trust in me that I was going to do good—that they already expected me to succeed—and then for them to see how terrible I did. I definitely felt the pressure.

D: Are you just talking about family? Or friends?

P1: Everyone as a whole; anyone that knows. Especially if you are a first generation, parents go everywhere—they go to the grocery store and are like, “oh, you know I just wanted to let you know my baby’s in college, my baby’s at the university.” It’s like people that don’t even know you will know something about you, will know that you are in college. When you come back and you don’t do as well as you would have hoped to, it’s definitely a little discouraging.

D: How would you define success? Is this your definition or others?

P1: I believe success is when you truly find where you are happy or content with the process that you have made toward your goal. This is definitely my definition of what it means to be successful.
D: How would you describe your success at Ohio University?

P1: I believe that I am being successful here at OU. I am still here despite the hardships I faced coming here last year. Success shouldn’t be measured by what goals you have tried to obtain or complete but by the attitude you have to progress.

D: What 2-3 things have impacted your belief in your ability to accomplish a set goal or task?

P1: I would have to say that belief in yourself definitely helps tremendously. I would have given up a long time ago had I not believed in my abilities to succeed. Also, a good support system (friends, family, etc.) gives me the drive to be successful.
Interview 2

D: Can you please tell me about your decision to go to college?

P2: I guess I never really considered not going to college. It was something that I considered as a necessity for me to do so that I could get a good job and support myself, and hopefully be able to afford to have to support a family at some point, a house, all that stuff. My parents were both in the air force. My mom started an associate’s degree but didn’t get to finish it because she decided that her priority was being at home with me. And we didn’t have the money for it. She still works for the accounting in the air force so she has all the knowledge she needs, she just doesn’t have the paper. My dad went to some sort of vocational school right out of high school but never used what he learned at all for work, he went into the air force. Instead of going into forestry, which is what he went to vocational school for they have a use for that in the air force, I’m sure; he ended up doing courier work—driving anything with wheels. He just never wanted to drive any planes.

D: What things or people influenced your decision to go to college?

P2: Like I said, my parents were definitely interested in me going to college. My dad’s parents were the grandparents in my life. They lived not a five minutes walk away from where I lived when I started elementary school. They were very interested in my education: wanted me to learn, wanted me to grow. Both of them have more information in their brains than I think I will ever have in my lifetime. I mean, it’s just amazing that they can take the time and have the interest. I mean they both taught themselves. My grandfather repaired watches and clocks. He had one eye that worked. He got hit in the head with a baseball when he was a kid. He has a special extra lens for his glasses where he can pop his eyeball out that is back here where he can deal with the extra lens that is in watches.** He is truly an amazing person. He makes me want to learn. That’s about it; he makes me want to learn.

D: Good. What were your expectations for college?

P2: I heard lots of stories in high school about how professors didn’t care if you passed the class and they didn’t care whether you passed it or not—they went to college to teach because didn’t care about the students, and they were always in big classes and it didn’t matter. I was terrified about not living with my parents because I had never done that before. I’m very much a home body. I like being close to home where I have my roots.

D: Have your expectations of college changed now that you have been here for a year?

P2: I’m not terrified anymore.

D: That’s good.
P2: Most of the teachers that I’ve had—I’ve had a few very excellent ones and a few I wish I could have not had—but most of them do show interest in their students. They all have open office hours. They all have ways to contact them. Some of them have TAs that you need to talk to first, which gets under my skin a little, but I understand them being busy because they have lots of classes not just one. And I guess the TAs probably know what they are doing or they wouldn’t be TAs. I’m not technically terrified about not living at home anymore. I haven’t got my new roommate yet so I’m a little not at ease with that situation yet. But I’m sure it will be fine.

D: So this will be your first year living alone?

P2: I lived in a dormitory last year. I had a random roommate actually this year and last year. I’m not very good making friends with a wider variety of people. Well, I guess I don’t mean variety—a wider population of people. I’m used to my small town with one stop light.

D: So it’s different.

P2: Yes.

D: What are some of your vocational or career goals?

P2: I would like to finish up a bachelor’s in psychology pre-physical therapy and go to grad school for physical therapy.

D: Wonderful. And what has shaped your goals?

P2: My dad has just finished up his fifth back surgery and he can still walk most of the time. And most of the time because I still have to pick him up off the floor occasionally. He got hit by a drunk driver then he got rear-ended. The he fell down at a construction site where he was a safety manager managing inspections. There have been a lot of dumb things and a lot of complications with the surgeries. Even before that I wanted to help people. That’s always been my passion—to help people. I don’t want to be a medical doctor because I don’t like the internal stuff. I don’t have the patience to try to memorize every single muscle and bone and then to look at it. It’s just not my thing. But what they do in physical therapy is enough. I don’t want to know how to sew things back together, I just want to fix it.

D: Who has had the greatest impact on who you have become and why?

P2: That’s a tough one; it’s a very long list. Well, I mentioned my grandparents earlier. You know my dad didn’t have a college degree, but he found a business owner who was willing to take a chance on the fact that he’d been in the air force—he had an outstanding
performance record. I want to do him justice the way that he taught me. I’ve worked my butt off and it’s something I can be proud of. My mother is just as stubborn and it wouldn’t be right to not say how much she has encouraged me and how much she has helped me figure myself out and figure out things that have happened with other people. Both my parents have a lot of wisdom when it comes to dealing with people. My dad reads people very well and it’s something he was trying to teach me how to do, which I think will help if I get to be a physical therapist being able to get people and read people will help me, I think. I don’t know, my family has been a big impact in my life.

D: What are your family’s beliefs about education?

P2: Extreme importance. My education comes first. They are always concerned that I am going to work too many hours and not get to study enough. My parents didn’t want me to even have to work. They would prefer to pay for everything, but after my dad got hurt so much there was no option. I had to do something so I got a part-time job. I get paid decently for being in college and having no real experience before I got there. I had never had a job before. I started working my freshman year of college. They want education to be my primary goal and it is. I think at this point my education is their primary goal as well.

D: What motivates you and why?

P2: I think I’m motivated in school a lot by my family and my own expectations of myself. I have high expectations of myself. Part of the reason I’m retaking a class this summer is because I didn’t like the grade I got in it so it was going to be better. That’s really all there is to that. I knew I could do better and I am. I’m going to do better this time. I also didn’t fail any classes my first quarter.

D: Good for you.

P2: I remember a lot of people complaining about biology 170—talking about how horrible—when I saw my biology teacher from my high school I said, “Hey, guess what, I’m not going to become a biology teacher.” I want to do well and I want to make people proud of me because a lot of people put a lot into me.

D: Can you describe for me a time you felt supported?

P2: Anytime I felt supported?

D: Yeah.

P2: I guess a good example would be when I had trouble with my chemistry 122 class spring quarter and my parents were very—they were concerned because I was upset about it. I wasn’t happy that I was performing poorly in the class and when they would
call I would tell them that I’m not getting it, I don’t understand this, I don’t know how to set this up, I can’t figure out how to work this out. And as long as I was trying my best at it, as long as I was putting all of myself into it, if I was trying to accomplish it, that was enough. They were happy. She’s trying, she’s doing her best, and if she still doesn’t get it then there’s something wrong with the teacher. And the only other thing that was said about it was: well, try and have your grade high enough that your scholarship will cover it and we won’t have to pay it back. When I said I was retaking it they were like, “Oh, good. You can do better this time. I hope you understand it.”

D: They were very supportive. It seems like you had a lot.

P2: Yeah.

D: Was there another time that you wanted to share?

P2: My parents are very supportive when it comes to—well, I’m the only child. So of course being their only baby I guess I get everything they can provide and support is something they think is very important because they didn’t really get it when they were growing up. They are very much aware that support is key to feeling like you are something.

D: How do you think your college experience is different from a student who has parents who have earned a bachelor’s degree?

P2: Well they probably make more than my parents do so if they do have to work it’s more like an extra curricular activity and not if I don’t get this much money by the end of the quarter than we are going to be in trouble when we go to pay for what we have to pay for at the beginning of next quarter. My parents ask me to try to get half of my school funding. So I got a job on campus. They made me a manager or a student manager I guess I should I say. After working for the summer they asked me to take the student manager course in the fall so that they could put me to work in the winter as a student manager. And they gave me a couple of pay raises for it because before the minimum wage went up they gave you a fifty cent pay raise from minimum wage for taking the class and another one for becoming a manager. So basically you went up a dollar for telling them that you were going to be there when they needed you and work your butt off and not complain, which is what I was doing anyway, which is why someone told me they wanted to promote me. I was like “Oh, ok, if you say so.” I just chalk it up to my father’s side of me and move on. Like I said I think I have had to work. People who have gone through the college experience usually have a better idea of what to expect when people go. So I found myself a lot of times trying to explain to my dad why I’m having trouble, or why something has to be done, or why I have to live on campus—no, I can’t live at home. I have to live on campus to go to work. People in town won’t pay me that much and I also don’t have my driver’s license because I live in a one-stoplight town and never needed it. So, I’ve learned to drive. I have a permit and am in the process of getting
to where I can get the test over with. Hopefully I’ll have a license halfway through fall quarter as soon as I can learn to parallel park, which I’m told is not as hard as it sounds.

D: On a scale of one to five with one being the least likely and five being definitely, how would you rate your likeliness to complete your undergraduate degree?

P2: Five.

D: In general, on a scale of one to five, how would you rate your belief in yourself and your ability to complete a task?

L: I would say that most of the time I’m somewhere around a four. Usually I just pretend I’m a five but I’m stubborn as all get out and will not quit—to get me through things that I cannot do or find someone to help me.

D: Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your experience as a first generation college student—that maybe I didn’t even ask?

P2: The only thing is that sometimes you feel it, sometimes you know that other people are better prepared for what they are getting into because their parents have already done this.

D: How would you define success? Is this your definition or others?

P2: I usually picture success the same as my parents on first instinct—money. A college degree is probably considered a 'success' in my family, as is a steady job. When I give it further thought, I think of success as happiness. If I can find a way to help people, make a livable amount of money, and have a family, I'll consider myself successful.

D: How would you describe your success at Ohio University?

P2: Right now, tremulous. Last year I avoided 'going out' as a general rule, so I spent more time studying. Now I'm learning to balance. I think once I can find the good balancing place, I'll be able to return to my A's and B's and I'll be what I consider a successful student.

D: What 2-3 things have impacted your belief in your ability to accomplish a set goal or task?

P2: Well, my parents have always acted as though I could accomplish anything, so I guess it just kind of stuck. Also, I'm very stubborn, so when I set a goal or decide on a task, then I stick to it-- imagine that terrier type dog with it's favorite chew toy. When I have trouble with accomplishing something, I look for support. Usually my problems come when whatever it is doesn't feel important anymore, so I ask my parents or my best
friend to remind my why I chose to do this thing. When it's just something I don't want to have to do, I remember a particular Bible verse--"Whatever you do, do it with all your heart. Do it for the Lord and not for men."
Interview 3

D: Can you please tell me about your decision to go to college?

P3: I pretty much didn’t have a choice. My parents always told me I was going. I decided where I wanted to go my senior year and I didn’t go there. I decided on Michigan State, and I didn’t go there because of some family issues and money and some things of that nature so I went to the University of Michigan for two years. Then we had some financial issues and that wasn’t really the right college for what I wanted to go to school for, which is forensic chemistry. They didn’t really help me at all so I stopped going for two years and I started to work for two years. Then I started to search online and I found Ohio University and I applied. I was rejected the first time. I went to a junior college for a summer. I took a couple classes and brought my GPA back up. I reapplied and got accepted. I’ve been here since 2004.

D: I know you kinda mentioned that you didn’t have a choice in going to college, but are there any other people or things outside of your parents that influenced your decision to go to college?

P3: Well I knew that I couldn’t make it that far without going to college. They told me I had to go, but it wasn’t really a fight. I was like ok. The question and the decision came in where and for what.

D: What were your expectations for college?

P3: That’s a good question. I didn’t really have any. I didn’t know what to expect because they couldn’t share their experiences because they both—they didn’t go far. My dad stopped going to college and he started working in a shop—GM if I’m not mistaken. My mother never shared her story so I don’t know if she really went or not. But the closer it came for me to come here, my cousin—she is older, she’s 35, I think—she graduated from Tennessee so she came on my visit, and she shared things I should be looking for with me. That was maybe a month before I was getting ready to come here. At home I went to the Flint branch so I didn’t live on campus. I lived with my parents so it was just like going to high school. It was just going to class and going to work. And it was the same with the junior college. It was maybe ten minutes away from my home.

D: So now that you are here at OU, have your expectations of college changed from what they were in the beginning to now? Has there been a change?

P3: Yeah, it’s a lot more stressful. One thing I noticed here is that if you don’t know what you are doing, you are pretty much in trouble. I’m behind a whole year because apparently my advisor doesn’t know how to advise. So I’m kinda doing it myself. Even though this is my last year here hopefully if it works the way that I have planned, I still don’t know what I’m doing. I don’t if it was because I was a transfer. I see a lot of the
D: What are your vocational career goals?

P3: Can you repeat the question?

D: What do you want to do once you finish school?

P3: Oh, ok. As of right now, I don’t think I want to go to graduate school. If I do later, it will be later. But, I definitely want to work in a police crime lab. Both of my cousins have been looking and telling me things that are open in their cities and in their states. I’m really, really good with my hands, but every single lab I have taken here is just a lecture where you have a problem of some kind. So I don’t know if I will be able to do that.

D: What has shaped your goals?

P3: Well I’m a selective TV watcher, but I did watch Forensic Files—all the real shows, not the CSI TV drama stuff. I’ve been watching them since I was younger and I’ve always wanted to do it. I never knew what it was called, but I would just watch it. My mother said it was forensics so when I was looking for a school to go to I put that in and when that came up for here I was happy about it. And then I was reading a couple of books and they actually had this school listed as a good school to go to if you wanted to go into this field so I was happy about that.

D: Who has had the greatest impact on who you have become and why?

P3: Does it have to be a person?

D: You can choose.

P3: Ok, well if I had to choose a person I would definitely say it would have to be my dad. He’s very supportive and I know that when I got here my grades started to fall, but I graduated number five in my class in high school. And you know I got good grades here, but when I got my first D I was so ready to go home. I was crying and everything and he was like, “D—he calls me D—it’s ok.” He was supportive. He didn’t curse at me** or anything like that. And I was like well if my dad ain’t mad at me then maybe I can do it over. I would say he’s always been supportive. Even when I complain; when I’m like, “Oh dad, I’m miserable** here and I’m old and why am I still in school when all of my friends have graduated.” You know, just ranting and raving. And he’s like, “That’s your time right now, D. Just stick it out.” He’s very positive.

D: Now, I take it that there is something else.
P3: I have definitely renewed my relationship with God while I’ve been here because when I got here I didn’t have any friends so I didn’t have a choice. It was just me and my room and my Bible. We definitely got close and then I was fortunate enough to meet some really great people. Just being with them, and they are on the same page as I am—and it was wonderful. It was a really wonderful experience. I miss them already. I cannot wait for fall.

D: What are your family’s beliefs about education?

P3: Well I think it’s important, but they had three girls. I’m the oldest of three girls. I and my youngest sister—she’s in college, too. But the middle one, she didn’t go to college. She went to cosmetology school. So you know, it’s like as long as you are doing something positive and trying to better yourself they’re supportive.

D: What motivates you and why?

P3: I want to get away from here so anything that I have to do to step it up to get away from here. I’m really tired of being here. I love the people and the experience is ok, but I’m tired of it.

D: Now you mention that you feel supported by your father but are there any other times that you can think of where you felt supported that you might want to share?

P3: My dad, he supports everything. He’s so supportive of his children. He pretty much supports all of us. Even when I did sports and stuff, he was always there.

D: What about on campus? Did you get any support on campus?

P3: I would say from my new found friends, yes. Other than that, no.

D: How do you think your college experience is different or has been different from students who have parents with a college degree?

P3: I don’t know. I honestly don’t know. I’ve never really thought about it.

D: On a scale of one to five how likely are you to complete your undergraduate degree with a one being least likely and a five being definitely?

P3: I’m definitely going to say a five because I have to get away from here. That would be like so many years wasted. That defeats the point if I quit. I’ve never been a quitter. I either have to quit to get away from here or finish to get away from here so I might as well finish.
D: Now in general on a scale of one to five how would you rate your belief in yourself to accomplish whatever goal or task you set for yourself?

P3: I’d say a three. It gets discouraging a lot, especially with me being here by myself.

D: Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience, maybe there’s something that I haven’t asked?

P3: I just don’t want to let people down. If I was to quit, my dad, he probably would be in agreement but he would be disappointed. And then I have my baby sister that is behind me too. I can’t be doing stuff like that because I have to be a role model for her. That’s a lot of pressure. It’s heavy.

D: How would you define success?

P3: Just having a goal or something that you are trying to obtain or reach and get. As long as you reach it, you are successful. It doesn’t matter how long it took you to get there or whatever you had to do to get there.

D: In your experience here at OU would you say that you have been successful? Or how would you describe your time here at OU? Or what would it take for you to say you were successful at Ohio University?

P3: Well, I would want to bring my GPA up. And then to actually finish. Then I’ll be happy, but it’s hard.

D: Now the definition that you gave me of success, is that your definition or your parents definition?

P3: I don’t know. We don’t really talk about it. That’s what I think it is.

D: The last question I have for you is; what are two or three things that have impacted your belief in yourself—like your belief in your ability to accomplish your goals.

P3: I try to stay positive so it’s like if I’m putting forth some effort, I should be able to do this. I encourage myself.

D: Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your experiences as a first generation college student?

P3: As far as classes go—like if I see I’m having trouble—my first step is to find out why. It’s either to go to an instructor for more assistance or read more or maybe ask someone else who has taken the class to see if it really is that hard. I just try to see what ways I can get back on top of it. So it depends on the class because a lot of the classes
I’m taking now my friends have taken before me or are taking at the same time. I seem to work better in groups or at least discussing it with somebody.
Interview 4

D: Can you tell me about your decision to go to college?

P4: It was just the next thing to do. Everybody was going to college. We had colleges coming through—it was like eight, nine college coming to visit during our lunch period. It was during lunch period everyday. It was just what the next step was. It’s not like I went to other inner-city schools where they are just trying to get you through school. They’re giving you those options. They expect you to go to school when you graduate. And then my parents—they went to school, but they didn’t finish. I don’t know why my father didn’t finish—he was like a quarter away from being done, which is just retarded to me. And then my mom, I think she had me and that’s why she didn’t finish. I think it was either me or my brother, it was probably me. So they wanted me to go. My brother, he went to school, but he stopped for awhile and he’s going back now.

D: Is your brother older?

P4: Yeah, my brother—I’m 24 about to be 25—my brother’s 31 about to be 32.

D: Is there anyone else that has influenced you to go to college?

P4: My uncle did. He went to the University of Cincinnati. Really all my family did. They were like you are so smart. I’m like the brain child in my family. Everyone in my family, they think I’m like the golden child. It’s like Scott* gets what he wants. He does this, does that. They expect a lot out of me. I really don’t think I had any other choice but to go to school.

D: What were your expectations of college?

P4: I didn’t have any. I mean, I heard that college was going to be like this party all the time. You can go to class if you want. You have all this freedom. It was all a bunch of, I feel, stereotypical things. I went to school and it was just like high school to me. I mean everything that people were doing in college me and my friends had done already. So it was boring to me. I learned that if you want to have fun in college you have to make it fun yourself.

D: Did your expectations change at all over the years—with you having switched school? At first you were at Tennessee and then you switched here. So did your expectations change at all?

P4: When I first got here I expected it to be hard and more challenging. And it was. I expected more interaction with my teachers. For the most part a lot of the expectations I had were met. I felt like when I transferred here to OU, I felt like this is what college should be like. I just as easily could have transferred to Ohio State, but I didn’t just want
to be a number. I wanted to be able to talk to my teachers if I had a problem. I wanted them to work with me versus them just kinda telling me the answers. A lot of my expectations coming from Tennessee State were basically like being challenged, having teachers that care, having better resources available to me, and just trying to have a good time. When I came here all those expectations were being met.

D: What are your vocational and career goals?

P4: I am going to take a year off and work in a hospital working on the cardio floor. I’m going to be doing these stress tests and basically doing EKGs and things like that. That’s just to get experience in my field because my major is exercise physiology. While I’m doing that I am also going to volunteer at a physical therapy clinic just to get some experience and volunteer hours so within the next year, year and a half, I plan to apply to PT school. And that’s going to be another three years and then I will be a doctor of physical therapy and hopefully do physical therapy for a sports team—hopefully, the Bengals.

D: What shaped your goals?

P4: When I was in high school, actually when I was a child I wanted to be a doctor. I’ve wanted to be a neurosurgeon since I was in kindergarten up until I was in the tenth grade.

D: How did you know about a neurosurgeon in kindergarten?

P4: I always wanted to be a brain surgeon. I wanted to do brain surgery, that’s just what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to be a doctor, the brain is very interesting. And one day I thought about it and was like how do I move all this stuff? And I asked the question and the teacher started talking about the brain. And I was like, I want to do that. And as I got older I learned more about how the brain functions, helping people function. And I was like, Oh yeah, that’s what I want to do. In high school I was playing football and I got injured a couple times, sprained ankles. Running track I pulled my hamstrings all the time. So I was always in the trainers’ office and sometimes I would have to meet over at their clinic for physical therapy and rehab. I was like this is all you do? And they were like yeah. And it just seemed like the easiest thing on earth. I was like you get paid just to go to sports and sit around and wait for somebody to get hurt. Or sit around and wait for somebody to come in then give them a couple exercises to do at home, and you get paid good money to do this? Yeah, it’s not easy, but you don’t do anything. I was like, hmm, I’ll do PT. Since people always say get a job in the field you love doing something you love—I love sports so it only makes sense. I wish I would have known about exercise physiology when I first came here because when I first came here I was biology pre-physical therapy. It’s a very difficult route so I went exercise physiology, which is still hard, but it’s easier than biology. It’s a different route leading to the same place.

D: Who has had the greatest impact on who you have become and why?
P4: I would have to say my brother because my parents, they both work all the time. It’s crazy. They both work like second shift. My mom and dad both wouldn’t get out until like 11:30. So I would always be with my brother who is seven years older than me. So he would watch me and we would go to my grandmother’s house, but I was always with him. He would always beat me up, and all types of just craziness. That’s pretty much what I spent a long, long time with. He’s the main person, but honestly, all of my family has had a lot of impact on me because we can all talk about anything and we all love each other. We do everything together. I feel like my family is not like a lot of other families. I mean a lot of people say that, but if they saw my family interact then they’d get it.

D: Is there something in particular?

P4: I don’t know. My family, we’re weird. Like my mother and father separated, but they still do everything together. They’re still married, but they don’t live in the same house, and you wouldn’t know that if you met them. People see me and my parents out somewhere or whatever. If something happened they would both come. They both still do everything, like they would do if they were in the same house. They just don’t live together. It’s the weirdest thing in the world, but it works.

D: You talked about this a little bit, but can you tell me what your family’s beliefs are about education?

P4: Honestly, I really don’t know what they think about it. It’s just if you can go, you should go, and if you want to go, you should go. My family is really supportive. I know I said I felt like I didn’t have any other options but to go to school, but if I would have chose something else they would have supported me either way. They always tell me don’t do what I did. Don’t try to be like me, be better than me. And they didn’t go to school so I guess that’s why they push to go to school. And with things being the way they are now you need at least a degree to get a decent job. And I’m not trying to be a policeman or a firefighter so I went to school. They really pushed me there.

D: What motivates you and why?

P4: For a long time it was just my goal to finish school because I’m not a quitter. Getting suspended I felt like—it would be personal gratification to finish school—but it would also be like you tried to kick me out and now I’m back to get my degree. My son, he’s the only thing that keeps me going everyday—work, school. He got me through all this. My last couple of classes—cause I’m really cracked out on school—so I feel tired and old all the time. It really is my son now. Whatever I do, I think about how it’s going to affect him or is he going to benefit from it. He’s the first person I think about before I do anything.
D: You mentioned a lot about feeling supported by your family and different things like that, but can you tell me about a specific time when you felt supported?

P4: After I got kicked out of school, my parents, they didn’t really scold me or talk down to me. They were like, “What do you have to do to get back and how can we help?” My mom paid for me to take classes at UC. She would come pick me up sometimes, worked a little bit, and was just there to help and support me. When I needed to talk to someone she gave me advice and encouragement—telling me to write my petition letter. She reviewed it, told me I might want to say this versus this. She’s always been there in my corner. Whenever there is something going on I can talk to her about it; like I have trouble with my son’s mother. I think she’s the craziest person on the face of the earth sometimes. I get off the phone with her sometimes and I will just be so mad and call my mom or call my dad. And they will be like, “don’t sweat it. You guys will grow older and then things like this won’t happen any more.” I’m like whatever. But I mean just the fact that they sit there and listen, it means a lot.

D: How do you think your experience as a first generation college student differs from your peers who are not first generation college students?

P4: I think it’s different from most first generation college students as well as those whose families have been here.

D: Tell me about that.

P4: Just because there are a lot of people who are first generation college students. They don’t necessarily come from the same kind of background that I come from, with the family support and everything. Like a friend of mine, her mother just passed. That was all she had. She’s from Cincinnati. She grew up in like downtown Cincinnati. All she had was her mother, and now she has to come back to school this fall and she doesn’t really know what she’s going to do. She doesn’t know if she’s going to be here at school. She doesn’t know what she’s going to do. She doesn’t know if she’s going to go back to Cincinnati. I mean, I haven’t had it hard like that. If I really needed something I could call my parents and get it. But I also have grown to the point where I’m an adult. If I need something I need to work and do what I need to do to get it. And I think some people whose parents have been to college and everything, I think some of them are spoiled because not everybody’s parents want them to get out and learn the lesson and really go out and be corrected by it. They just kind of say just go because I went, and this is what we do in our family. They’re not even sure if this is something they want to do. I think my experience has just taught me different across the board.

D: Let me make sure I understand this: one of the differences, the last point you made, is that some students whose parents went to college, that those students aren’t here necessarily by choice.
P4: Cause it’s like my friends goes to Howard and his girlfriend, the only reason she is at Howard is because her parents went to Howard. And they were like, you’re going to go to Howard. And she wants to do hair. That’s all she wants to do. What’s she doing in school? They’re paying for it so it’s like they went there because it’s just what you do.

D: On a scale of 1-5 with one being least likely and five being definitely, how likely are you to complete your undergraduate degree?

P4: It’s a five.

D: In general on a scale of one to five how would you rate your belief in yourself in terms of your belief in your ability to accomplish whatever goals you set for yourself?

P4: A five again because of the things I have had to go through in life: getting suspended from school, coming back, having a son, losing family—everything. I refuse to leave OU until they give me my piece of paper. I’ve paid so much money for this degree. I don’t quit. When I start something, I have to finish.

D: How would you define success?

P4: Just being happy with whatever you decide to do—as long as you are happy with yourself. If you set out to do something, and you do it to the best of your ability and are happy with it then you are successful. I don’t think you can really quantify like yeah I’ve got two million dollars, I’m successful. You could have two million dollars and hate yourself, are you really successful? No, successful is being able to enjoy life.

D: How does that tie in to your college experience? Do you feel like you have been successful here at OU, and, if so, how do you determine that?

P4: I feel I have been successful because I’ve learned more about myself. I’ve branched out and done things that I might have been uncomfortable with, and grew to like them. So I conquered fears that I might have had. I’m finishing school—that’s something that is clearly not easy. So me graduating soon, that’s successful. That’s something major that I came here to do. I’m just going to be done very soon.

D: What two or three things have affected your belief in yourself, in your own ability to accomplish the things that you expected to accomplish?

P4: When I lost my grandmother that really impacted me because the rest of my family was really broken. I was the only one who was really like holding it together the whole time and I had no idea how I was able to do that. Something I learned from one of my friend’s uncles because he was actually my substitute* teacher. He was actually a friend I went to Tennessee State with. His uncle was my teacher and he always told me like when
I was being bad in sixth grade, just doing stupid stuff, one day he pulled me aside and asked me why are you doing this? Why are you choosing to act out like this? And I didn’t have an answer for him. And sometimes I wouldn’t have done my homework and said I didn’t have it. He was like if you didn’t do it, say you didn’t do it. Man up and deal with the consequences. I think that that kind of molded me, too, because I’m at the point now where I don’t waste time. If I can do something, let’s do it and move forward. We can either make a situation better or just totally forget about it. That has carried over into me being in school because I have the same view. You just either get it done or whatever. I learned not to be a quitter. I hate quitters. If you say you’re going to do something then just do it or finish it. It doesn’t have to be great as long as you just try hard, give it an honest try.

D: Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your experiences as a first generation college student?

P4: No. Not that I can think of at the moment.
Interview 5

D: Can you please tell me about your decision to go to college?

P5: Well growing up I always wanted to go to school, like beyond high school. I don’t think there was ever a doubt in my mind that I wasn’t going to go. It was always just a matter of where I was going to go. I ended up picking OU because that’s where I got the most money and most of my scholarships were for schools in Ohio. I didn’t want to go to a small school or a fairly large school so OU came into the picture.

D: What things or people influenced your decision?

P5: To come to OU?

D: Well, to go to college in general.

P5: I would have to say my grandmother. She’s been a big part in my life with school and everything. She has always encouraged me to do better with classes and grades and things like that. And then I was in Upward Bound during high school. That’s actually how I heard about OU because we came here on a trip. I fell in love with the campus so I talked to some people, and then people I went to church with, they went here and were telling me about the school. That’s how I learned about OU and decided I was going to come here and give it a try.

D: What were your expectations? What did you expect from college?

P5: I thought it was going to be different. I wouldn’t have to answer to anybody. It’s just that I would be free. You know, like I wouldn’t have any rules or anything like that. It was going to be a big change because I came from a predominantly black high school and I didn’t expect it to be the way that it was—predominantly white in the classrooms, things like that. It was a big culture shock for me.

D: What are some of your vocational and career goals?

P5: After graduating, I plan on going to grad school for physical therapy. And then once I’m done with that, hopefully I’ll be able to open up my own clinic. I want to work with athletes, preferably college athletes or professional athletes.

D: Can you tell me what shaped your desire to work in physical therapy and with athletes?

P5: I always wanted to work with people in the health field. As long as I can remember I’ve always wanted to be some type of doctor. I’ve went from heart surgeon to brain surgeon to anesthesiologist to prosthetiologist. I started out with athletic training, but I
didn’t really care for the program so I switched over to exercise physiology, which would allow me to go to grad school for physical therapy. And while in athletic training, I had the opportunity to work with some of the teams for that program, and then I ended up working with the physical therapists over in Peden; and I’ve had a few jobs over in Hudson with the physical therapists and I thought I kind of liked it. I’ve always been into sports, so I’ve been in physical therapy myself a couple times. I just enjoy working with people.

D: Who would you say has had the greatest impact on who you have become and why?

P5: I would have to say my grandmother. She has always taught me to stand up for myself and just live life and work hard for what I want—not just give in to people and give up. She’s always encouraged me to push toward my goals.

D: You’ve talked a lot about your grandma, what would you say is your family’s belief about education.

P5: I think it’s a good thing. They stand behind it and they encourage me as well as other children in my family to go to school. I think with my family you get support when you are grown to make your own decisions. My mom say she’s going to be disappointed if I don’t go to school and things like that. I kind of feel like they think it is the right thing to do, to go to school so that they don’t end up like other people that they see about the city and things like that—so that they can do something with their lives instead of just complaining about the job that they may have, not making enough money and things like that.

D: What motivates you and why?

P5: Right now I would have to say getting good grades. It is pushing me to do better because—in the beginning, well in high school I was a straight A student, but the course work wasn’t very difficult. Once I got here it was kind of a shock because I got my first F here. I was like, ok, things aren’t going to be as easy. And I know that I can get A’s here and that things aren’t as hard as people show them to be. You can do it if you put your heart into it, study, all that. My nephew, he just started kindergarten yesterday so I want to finish school because I want him to look at me and say, “I want to be like my aunt and go to school and finish.” I’m going to be the first person in my family to graduate. My uncle went to school, but he didn’t finish so I’m going to be the first to graduate. I want my nieces and nephews to follow in my footsteps so I’m going to finish so that they see that it can be done and that there is nothing wrong with going to college. Things like that.

D: Can you describe for me a time when you felt supported?

P5: Actually, this past year, one of the advisors here who was my advisor for LINKS he actually helped me a lot when it came to grad school. We would meet once a week and he
would always check up on where I was coming with grad schools, where I wanted to go. He offered to help me pay for the application fees—things of that nature. Since I’ve been here I have paid for everything on my own. My parents and my grandparents—nobody has helped me with tuition, housing, or anything like that. Everything has either come from me getting financial aid or out of my pocket. So even though my family does support me, I don’t expect a lot from them when it comes to school because I know they have other expenses that they have to take care of. So for him to sit there and offer to pay for my applications out of his pocket told me that there are people here on campus that actually care about students. I would have to say that that was one of the times that I felt the most supported.

D: How do you think—or, do you think—that your college experience is different from your peers, from other students whose parents did go to college and earn a degree?

P5: I feel like it is a big difference because for those whose parents have gone to college and they’re not first generation, people down their family line have gone to college—to me it’s almost like a tradition for them. It’s like ok, my parents went to college so I’m going to go to college. For me, it’s like a big accomplishment for my family seeing as how I am the first person. Some people take it for granted, especially those who have full scholarships or who don’t have to worry about paying their tuition. They come; they go to class, they don’t go to class—it’s whatever. They take advantage of the fact that they aren’t paying out of the pocket for any of this stuff. Granted, I’m not paying out of pocket, but I have loans that I am going to have to pay back so I think I take it more seriously than others might take it.

D: On a scale of one to five with one being least likely and five being definitely, how likely would you say you are to earn your bachelor’s degree?

P5: Five.

D: In general on a scale of one to five how would you rate your belief in yourself and in your ability to accomplish whatever goals and tasks you set for yourself?

P5: At this point, a five.

D: How do you define success? What is success to you?

P5: Accomplishing your goals—setting goals that aren’t easily accomplished, but aren’t too difficult to accomplish—and accomplishing them. Then setting new goals and accomplishing them—pushing yourself to accomplish those goals.

D: When thinking about your definition of success and your experience here, how would you describe your level of success here at OU?
P5: I would have to say it’s going pretty good. I think I’ve done a pretty good job of accomplishing the goals that I’ve set and everyday I’m setting more and more goals.

D: So how will you know when you’ve been successful?

P5: For instance when I get that degree I will have reached that goal of graduating from college. And with grad school I will have reached the goal of getting into the school that I wanted to. And then getting my PhD and opening up my clinic and things like that…

D: What are two different things that have impacted your belief in yourself, in your own ability to accomplish your goals?

P5: Like things? Or people?

D: Whatever

P5: My grades, my friends, and my family.

D: Is there anything else you would like to share with me about you experience as a first generation college student?

P5: No. Not that I can think of.
Interview 6

D: Can you please tell me about your decision to go to college?

P6: I don’t think there was a decision. It was never really an option. Ever since the sixth grade my father has put me in programs and prepared me to graduate from college. So there was never really a decision. I was always taught that it was college or working class. So by the time I was old enough to make a decision on my own, my mindset was that if I don’t have any special talent and I don’t go to college then I’m screwed. So I guess I’m just going to go to college.

D: Are there any other people or things that influenced your decision to go to college?

P6: I had my father pushing me to go. Maybe not until I got older and had already made the decision to go then I was looking for people who could help me out. And then when I got older, I guess my aunt was really the biggest one.

D: What were your expectations of college?

P6: I don’t know if I ever really had any. It was just school. School was school. I never thought about it. There was never a thought process, I never thought when I go to college this is going to happen. It was more like everyday life. I just knew I was going and that was pretty much it. Whatever happened, I had to deal with it. I was also in Upward Bound going to classes in the summer on a college campus. That gave me the feel of college so that when it was time to go it was just like another day in class. I never really thought about all of the extra stuff.

D: Do you have expectations now that you have been in school?

P6: Well, now my expectations are for me to grow in relation to my major and my field of study. There are a lot of experiences and a lot of things I want to know before I leave, but I’m not sure if that is an expectation of college itself or the expectations I have for myself to make the most out of the rest of the time that I have.

D: When is your expected graduation date?

P6: Not until the summer of ’09.

D: What are your career or vocational goals?

P6: Well, I’m family studies. That by definition is assisting families. So that can be anything. I’m thinking about working with at-risk youth. I’m not really sure what my role is going to be. I’ll keep in general in case I want to expand to self esteem for adolescent or just younger people: self-esteem and just to show them the opportunities that they
have. Of course the kids have been forgotten and pushed aside to make a spare chance for themselves in the world. That’s huge, general, and broad, but someway I’m going to find where I fit. I’m not sure if it is in an adoption agency or maybe a group home where I can do my own curriculum, my own life skills, or maybe just through a church, I’m not sure. I don’t want to work with babies or the elderly; I want to stay in the middle. It’s the age group that has the most significance—not too young for me to not be able to talk to them, but they are still young enough to learn a lot and change a lot, and take advantage of opportunities that might come about.

D: What would you say has really shaped your career path and your interests?

P6: I don’t know. I think it’s just a part of me that has always been there. It’s always been in my heart. I’ve always been a giving friend, a shoulder to lean on, a counseling friend, the one to give you my money at lunch. I’ve always been a softy. I want to do anything to help somebody, to cheer somebody up. So it’s just my personality, and I found an area of study that would allow me to use it.

D: Who has had the greatest impact on who you have become and why?

P6: I would have to say my father. I think he made me a professional because that’s all I remember—just thinking about my life. I would say more than half of it was school, preparing for school. Every summer since sixth grade I have been on a college campus. Every class that I have ever complained about, my dad would take it back to well you have to do this because you have to go to college. Or you have to do well because your GPA is going to get you in to college. Or you can’t go out and act crazy and drink and do drugs because you have to go to college. I wasn’t allowed to get Cs. Everything was As and Bs, and if I got too many Bs I would still get in trouble. Everything has always been preparing for college. There really wasn’t anything else. Anything outside of that was probably just a relief or an outlet, but my life has pretty much been school. That pushing me has created an attitude of expectancy: I can do what I want if I work for it, as long as I put my mind to it. I have the self-esteem. I have the confidence. He shaped my determination and that kind of goes into everything else.

D: What would you say are your family’s beliefs about education?

P6: My family believes that education is the answer. My father believes that education is the answer to everything, it’s a cure-all. If you get an education your life is going to be golden and that’s it. My mother is a do-the-best-you-can-type person. If I get an education, I do. If I don’t, then I can make my own way, the way she did. My family seems to feel like education is something that is not for them, that it takes a different kind of person, a different lifestyle. So it is one of those untouchable, bigger-than-life things for most of them—except for my dad.

D: You mean your extended family?
P6: Yeah, my cousins and all that. They’re like Symphonie’s doing that so I’m not going to go. That’s kind of how it is. It’s frustrating. Because I know that they can go too. I don’t want to be the only one—especially if they think of she’s going to get a great job and give us money. I don’t want to be the only one who has an education. The only one they can go to: Symphonie, how do you do this, how do you do that?

D: Is that how it’s been so far?

P6: Kind of. They don’t really go to me so much, they just expect me to do everything. I guess I’ve kind of been protected because of it. I’m like the little diamond in the rough. They protect me, they shield me. I’m kind of labeled as the goodie-two-shoes, the brain. It hasn’t deterred me, but it is kind of frustrating because I can see that they can do it, too, and they can’t see it. So now since I’m the only one I feel like it is my responsibility to enlighten them, to show them, to open doors, to push all of them.

D: So what is it that motivates you?

P6: Other people motivate me. Like I said, that heart has been there forever. Helping other people always motivates me. My dad has pushed me so much to see me graduate. I don’t want him to feel like all he’s done was for nothing. My mom is a pay-your-own-way type of person, and I want to see her relax. I want to be able to take care of her. I want to be able to provide. Outside of that, just like I said; the kids, the less fortunate, the ones that don’t know what’s on front of them. The ones that may not have as many opportunities and may have to really struggle harder than other people. If I can put myself in a position to help them then I’ll do what I have to do to be able to help others. I do feel good, but on the other hand I kind of neglect myself naturally, I guess. It’s always something outside of me that motivates me—helping other people. I have to be helping somebody else,* that’s always my motivation.

D: Can you describe for me a time when you felt supported?

P6: The most recent was in Mexico on the study abroad and my family had a huge dinner and all of my cousins and stuff came over. And my uncle, the mean uncle who beats everyone up and who yells and screams—the one you are scared to talk to, he gave me money. They all gave me money—all my cousins came together and just showed that they really supported me. And I know that they do, but I guess I could see in that setting how they were aware of what I was doing and my efforts. So I felt really supported then. And I think me leaving the country is kinda like wow, she’s really doing something different and we want to make sure she’s able to do. If we can’t do it, we want to make sure that she’s able to do it at any cost. I felt really supported then.

D: How do you feel or think that your college experience has been different from kids who have parents who have already been to college and earned a degree?
P6: I think first off, the financial is always an issue. Statistically if your parents went to college then you are probably more fortunate than the family that I come from. Also, I think it is easier to take it for granted. And since I have been preparing for college my entire life—even I took it for granted because for me there was no other way. It wasn’t a special opportunity for me because it was the only way for me. So if I can take it for granted then I am sure that someone whose parents went to college is more prone to taking the opportunity for granted also. I think the beginning phase is where the most differences are. Starting with financial aid, applying to colleges, SAT/ACT scores and testing—all the things to get you started. For somebody who doesn’t know and is just searching around and running around, even just the FAFSA was rough. So somebody who has a parent, let alone two parents, who have already done it—I’m sure it probably lessens the stress a little bit. And then even a parent like my father who didn’t go to college so he feels like it is the golden ticket. What is there to complain about? So he negates all of the stress and the work. He knows that it is there, but for him it is like you can either struggle in school or you can struggle everyday at work like me and hate it. So for him it was like, what are you complaining about? And he doesn’t understand how stressful it can be because he’s never gone to college. So in his mind—for now, it’s like a dream for me to be in college, it’s one of those dreams that you never like, live out. For me to complain, he almost blows up. He’s just like what are you talking about, class can’t be that hard. And for me to have had so much success with my grades. For me struggling in a class, it’s just like that’s ridiculous. You can get an A, you’ll be fine. SO, maybe just if he had gone to college and experienced, you know, the campus life, even the scheduling and the classes, maybe I could talk to him more, maybe I could get more support that way, if he knew what it was like to be here.

D: I have a quick question. You have frustrated and overwhelmed connected. Is that because they are almost one and the same?

P6: They are like one in the same and because they are both caused by the same thing like being unprepared.

D: Now you mentioned that in the beginning is where you think the greatest differences are between first generation and non-first generation. Do you think that the difference lessens as you have more years in college? Do you think the difference between first generation and non-first generation decreases?

P6: Maybe, because once you get started it’s pretty much just class, it’s just school. So outside of scheduling your own classes, I don’t think there is too much that is different from high school. It’s just the ins and the outs (of college). Once you are on campus and you are on your way I think everyone is kind of in the same boat as far as getting through and the level of learning and all that type stuff. As far as you can generalize from their family I think people are in the same boat when they get started.
D: On a scale of one to five with one being least likely and five being definitely, how likely are you to complete your undergraduate degree?

P6: Absolutely a six! I am not- I will not. If I don’t complete this degree it would have to be them saying no, stop. Or I would have to be killed or something. It would have to be something drastic because there is absolutely no way I would go through all of this and not finish. That is not an option, at all. I don’t care if I have to crawl across the stage.

D: In general on a scale of one to five using the same scale how would you rate your own belief in yourself and in your own ability to accomplish the tasks and goals that you have for yourself?

P6: I’d probably say a four.

D: And how would you define success? What is success to you?

P6: I think success is accomplishing your own goals. Because some people are successful when they get their degree, but if that’s not what you want then that is not successful in your eyes. If you want to be a movie star, what is a bachelor’s degree? So I think accomplishing the goals that you have for yourself is success. And I would like to say that those goals should somehow improve*--giving back to the community or feeding into your community. I think it’s really relevant. Whatever you need to do to accomplish that goal is success.

D: So how would you describe your success here at college, while you’ve been at OU?

P6: I guess the majority of the time, the first two years, my goal was, first, to stay focused spiritually and also to get the highest grades possible because I’m on a scholarship. I think my grades are ok—I feel like I’m doing better. If I had to weigh my success on a scale I would probably say maybe a four. I’ve gotten the grades, I can’t create a scholarship*, but I’ve worked very hard for my grades and I’ve grown a lot spiritually. Those were my general goals. Well, maybe I’ll say a three. There are also other things that I had goals of. Minor goals, like time management—I don’t think I’ve made any progress with that one. I think I’ll keep it at a three because of the time management deal. I’m always overworked, overwhelmed. I don’t feel like I have learned as much as I could have because I rushed through so many classes—doing what I needed to do for so many classes as opposed to really taking in the information. Initially my goal was just to get the grades. Now that I’m older and I actually have a major that I like—initially I hated my major so I was like whatever I just need to get the grades. But now that I’ve found a place where I can really see myself being useful, my goal is now to get as much information and experience as I can. My goals are different so my success is harder.

D: So do you think your definition of success differs from your parents’ in any way?
P6: My dad used to think money was success—that would make him happy. My mom may be similar to that—it’s just money. And I am not that type of person. I’m a heart-guided type person. Money isn’t a huge deal to me. And I think my dad feels that if I’m making money then I don’t have to work under somebody everyday that I can’t stand—that is successful whether it’s what I really want to do or not. I think it’s just the opportunities; their lifestyles are different so to them they are just looking for a relief and that would be successful. In their situation that’s money—you have no college experience and a low-paying job. So to them money is success. That’s not the case for me.

D: What are two or three things that have impacted your beliefs in your own ability to accomplish your goals?

P6: A combination of our position and my own determination. Like I said, I really don’t consider failure as an option. Opposition such as where I come from and being a minority really fuel me to do better because I don’t feel like anyone is better than me. I want to show other minorities and other women that they can do whatever they want. So I think that drives me—the opposition drives me more. I guess it’s natural. If you had everything given to you it wouldn’t be a big deal. Being a minority is a really big part of me and not coming from a rich family. I didn’t answer the question...

D: What are two or three things that have impacted your beliefs in your own ability to accomplish your goals?

P6: Also like the programs that my father put me in. They always taught me that you can do what you want. You have control. You can accomplish the goals that you have for yourself. So I’ve never really been in a place where I didn’t feel like I could do it. Now it’s just other things outside of if you want to go. Now that I’m getting a little older, my nieces and nephews and cousins who are little in the inner city. They aren’t doing anything and they don’t know, they have no idea. My parents told me the same thing and I didn’t know. My father was like GPA, GPA, and GPA and I told him that I didn’t care because I didn’t understand at this point. So now with them I think, maybe if they’re not going to do what they’re told, they’ll do what they see. For me knowing that at that age I didn’t listen either. I’ll give them something to look at so even if they don’t listen to me they know that there are other options.

D: Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your experiences as a first generation college student?

P6: I just think it’s the whole—being a first generation college student was kind of interesting because coming from a first generation college student, I guess the title is kind of exclusive. It kind of puts you on the outside like you are different. Just like any other title, if that’s all that you know you don’t feel different. So I never realized how big of a deal it was. I’m not a first generation college student, I’m Symphonie and I do what I want. I want to go to college so that’s what I’m going to do. But I think it’s interesting
how you’ve studied this population that I happen to fit in, but I never really looked at it like that. I never had a time where I sat down and thought, my parents didn’t go to college, you know what, I want to be the first. I never thought about that. Probably part of that has to do with the fact that I never really thought about it at all because it wasn’t an option. I wonder if other people think before someone presents it to them that I’m the first one to go and I’m going to be the first, and I’m going to make it happen, and it’s going to be hard because I’m the first. But I never thought about it. I probably never thought about the differences until I went through the process. Then I was like, okay, if my dad would have gone he would have known how to help me better. But I guess before then I didn’t really consider that. It’s just kind of interesting to me.

D: Until the study had you heard of the term before?

P6: I heard it before because Upward Bound it also a TRIO program. You had to be a first generation college student to get in to the program. But that whole time it was just like, sweet, I qualify. I didn’t understand the difference. I guess I didn’t see it as almost like a handicap or a disability is what it seems like: you’re parents didn’t go so you are going to struggle with a, b, and c…and you are going to have to deal with this and that other students won’t. I never looked at it like that. It was just like, my parents didn’t go to college so I can get in to this program that’s going to help me go to school. I guess the hardship part, I never really looked at myself. I never really considered the odds. You are at a disadvantage because your parents didn’t go and considering all of these things that may be different or that you may run in to because you come from a different setting, a different background. I never really looked at myself that way.

D: When did you begin to consider the disadvantages?

P6: The initial—I’ve been hearing about it since the sixth grade. I probably didn’t really consider the setbacks until like I said the beginning stages—the financial aid and getting into college. That was probably the only time until I started to get really frustrated with my classes and realized that my father could not understand what I was going through. So I’ll say pre-college and then not until recently that I would think well maybe this is why. Now I’ve actually thought about it. Maybe it’s because I never felt limited, I guess. I never felt like anyone owed me anything because of it. It’s just an extra title to me—I think we Americans like to organize things—if we can’t label it then it drives us crazy. It was a big deal for me being a minority and just in general how many of us complete college. But I never really gave it a lot of thought. And now with the experience I feel like I can look back and see the things that may have been easier. You have to find those kids who, like me, don’t understand and then help them so that they don’t realize it when they are a senior. And when they are a senior in high school it’s a rough process so I need to find people before-hand to get through it instead of the day before the deadline on the financial aid application and you don’t know what the application even means. I think that’s all.
D: Anything else?

P6: I don’t think so.
Interview 7

D: Can you please tell me about your decision to go to college?

P7: I felt it was very important to go to college because my parents didn’t go to college and it seems anymore that you have to go to college to get a career in anything. Money is an issue for me—like I want to make a lot of money. I know there are a lot of reasons why people go to college, but I just really want to have a good job and have a good life and not have to worry about struggling with money and everything.

D: What people or things would you say have influenced you decision about college?

P7: Definitely my older cousins—I probably have five cousins who are currently enrolled in college and they all have really good majors that are going to be very high-paying, and they’ve been very successful. I felt that if they can do it, so can I.

D: What were your expectations of college?

P7: Well I knew it was going to be hard at first so I didn’t have really very high expectations according to my grades. I’ve always been a pretty good student all through high school. So I kind of had high expectations, but I knew it was going to be difficult because it was my first quarter. I just expected myself to do well and become more independent in my life and stuff like that.

D: Have your expectations changed at all? Let’s see, what year are you?

P7: I’m a sophomore.

D: You’re a sophomore so have your expectations changed at all over the year?

P7: I definitely expect to go to grad school for sure. Not really, they haven’t really changed. I mean, I’m probably expecting more of myself, academic wise—like I’m expecting myself to do a lot better than I did my first year. I probably have higher expectations for this year.

D: What would you say are your vocational or career goals? Like what careers do you have in mind that meet with your educational goals?

P7: My major is pre-physical therapy so I would definitely like to become a physical therapist, but recently I took a psychology class over the summer. I’ve actually thought about changing my major to child psychology so I’m kind of up in the air right now as to what I really want to do. I know I have to make a decision soon, but I have a couple of different ways that I could go.
D: Is there anything in particular that shaped your interests in the physical therapy?

P7: Well I’m taking physical therapy through psychology so I’m required to take psychology classes, and my psychology professor over the summer was just wonderful. He had so many stories and he just loved his job. It sounded so interesting to me and I was so interested in the class. It really made me think that maybe one day I would like to be a psychologist.

D: What about physical therapy?

P7: I wanted to do physical therapy because I played three sports all through high school so I was very busy, very active. I knew that I would never pursue a career in professional sports, but I wanted to get as close to sports as I could. I knew that a lot of sport injuries and stuff require physical therapy so I just wanted to kind of stay around sports.

D: Do you play any sports here at OU?

P7: No, I play intramural sports, but that’s it. I don’t play any college sports.

D: Who would you say has had the greatest impact on who you have become and why?

P7: I think my mother. My mom has definitely pushed me a lot, to go to college. She’s pushed me to do well, go to class, get good grades. And probably my dad, too, because if I ever—I’m kind of like the child he expects the most of because I’m the oldest, so I kind of have to step it up. If I ever got a C I would always get grounded. He was like “Well you won’t get grounded if you get better grades.” So definitely my parents, because they have helped me a lot through college and stuff.

D: What’s your parents’ highest education?

P7: They both just went to high school; neither of them went to college. They got married right out of high school. They met in high school.

D: When did you decide to go to college?

P7: Well I’ve always known that I wanted to go to college. There was never a doubt that I didn’t want to go to college because it’s just the society we grew up in. You pretty much have to go to college and if you don’t you can’t get a job.

D: What would you say are your family’s beliefs about education?

P7: What do you mean by beliefs?
D: What is your family’s perspective about education? What do they think about education?

P7: Well they think it is very important because it is very important. They can’t imagine me not going to school. Like if I dropped out of school that would be the end of my relationship with my parents. They think it’s very important, that education is very important. And I think they’ve learned from their mistakes because my mom is always saying that “If I would have went to college I could have gotten this job and then I could be doing this.” She’s saying you don’t want to end up like me, you want to become something. They definitely think education is very important.

D: What would you say motivates you and why?

P7: Probably just to be successful because I hate it when I don’t succeed. I just get so down. So I feel motivated to get good grades- to study while all of my other friends are going out partying. Just to succeed is my motivation.

D: Can you tell me a little more about that? What does it mean to you to succeed?

P7: One part would be to get good grades. I see that as being successful. If you get good grades then that means that you have mastered the info, that you know everything there is to know about that. Also I think to get in to grad school, I would consider successful because that’s one step closer to getting a career and doing what I want to do.

D: Do you think that your parents’ definition of success would be the same as yours?

P7: Yes, they’d agree.

D: Wonderful. Can you tell me or describe for me a time when you felt supported?

P7: The first thing that comes to mind is that fall quarter I signed up for a very difficult schedule and I ended up failing two of my classes, and I thought that that was going to be the end of it for me. I thought that my parents were going to pull me out of school, that they were going to say that this is not accepted, but they were really supportive. My mom was like, “It happens. It was your first quarter, you were nervous.” I haven’t really been away from home before. But my parents were definitely there—you know like, “It’ll be ok. Just take it again and it will be better.” I did take it again and I actually failed it again, but I’m taking it again in the fall. They were really supportive and keep pushing me to get on the books and to get help when I need help, which I do. I get free tutoring through CAP. I definitely take advantage of that so I think it will be a lot better this quarter. My mom is telling me constantly to keep with the books, to just do my best.

D: How do you think your college experience might be different from a student whose parents went to college and completed a degree?
P7: It was really hard at first because my parents didn’t know anything about paying for school or anything. So we had to rely a lot on my cousins and my aunts and uncle to explain to us that you have to get student loans if you can’t or don’t get scholarships or grants or things like that to pay for it. And I think someone who had been to college before would know that you have to where as we had to rely on my family members to help us out a little bit. That’s the big thing that comes to mind right now. That’s the big part, paying for school, and we had no idea what to do. It was very—we went in there with our eyes shut. We had no idea what was going on. That was the big thing I think that was harder on us because my parents didn’t go to college.

D: On a scale of one to five, with one being least likely and five being definitely, how likely are you to complete your undergraduate degree?

P7: Five. Definitely. I will find some way no matter what to complete it. If I can’t financially do it—student loans. I can’t imagine not finishing school. It’s not even a thought in my head. That’s why I don’t understand why people can just drop out of school and not finish. I just can’t imagine that at all.

D: I know you said you do not work. How do you finance your schooling?

P7: Well I have student loans. Last year I didn’t get any help at all. I didn’t get any scholarships. I didn’t get any grants, or anything. I did get a subsidized loan from the government, but I will have to pay that back—the rest is just student loans. Now this year I did get a grant, but still it wasn’t that much. I think it was my GPA from last year—that I still had a GPA above 3.0. I think that is why I got the grant. But student loans definitely…I mean I do have a job during the summer, but it’s not even nearly enough to pay for school. So right now I’m just trying to focus on getting student loans and not thinking about how I’m going to have to pay them back when I graduate. That’s another reason I want to find a job that pays good money because I am going to have a lot of student loans to pay back. It will be harder, it will take longer if I don’t have a job that pays well.

D: In general, using the same scale, how would you rate your belief in yourself and your own ability to set goals and tasks for yourself and to see them through?

P7: I would say it’s a three or a four. I am very hard on myself. I’m my own biggest critic. I am constantly talking down to myself, but sometimes that motivates me. When I talk down I’m like ok you’re doing really bad, you need to step it up a little bit. As far as goals—my ability over the last year has definitely changed. I’m a lot more able to set goals that are reachable. Like in high school I used to set goals that were completely out of my perspective. I don’t even know why I would think that I could do something like that. Probably a three or four. Sometimes I go down on myself and am really hard on myself, but I think I’m pretty good at setting goals and motivating myself to do well.
D: What two or three things would you say have impacted your belief in yourself and in your ability to accomplish your goals?

P7: I think whenever I failed my chemistry class that was a big eye opener for me. I had never failed a class in my life. And here, my first quarter of college I had failed a class. That was big for me to see that F on my report card. That was one thing that made me realize that I can’t give up. I can’t allow myself to do so poorly that I’m getting failing grades. That was probably one thing just to see that.

D: Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your experiences as a first generation college student that maybe I haven’t asked about or touched on?

P7: I didn’t really know anything going in to college. I mean I knew the classes were going to be big, but I didn’t know that I was going to have classes with, like, 200 people. My first quarter was definitely an eye opener. I didn’t realize that I was going to have to study every single night. I mean people tell you that, but you are like yeah, whatever, like in high school they tell you that you have to study too, and you don’t have to. So I kind of had that outlook. But then I got to school and I realized you really do have to study a lot, you can’t just slack off or you will fail. It was a big thing for me to realize—it was very hard. My first quarter here was very hard. I had a hard time adapting to the whole college scene—especially the party school scene here. That was not something I was used to in high school. I went to a Catholic school so it was very not like that at all. I did have to adapt a lot, and I was never really good at being an individual. I have learned how to become an individual—or independent, that’s what I’m trying to say. I became independent. It was hard at first, but it was worth it so far. I’m learning things still. I still have trouble; I still get down on myself sometimes. It’s still hard to adapt. I love college.

D: What has helped you to adapt? Or are there people or things that have helped you?

P7: I have helped myself a lot actually. Like my roommate and I, we got along, but it was kind of one of those things where you just- if you had a problem you just didn’t say anything because you didn’t want there to be problems. So I had to help myself. I became a lot more patient. I had to tell myself that I don’t want problems so I had to put up with a lot more—not that I was a pushover or anything like that. And I had friends, too. That’s another thing; I didn’t know anybody when coming here. I knew a couple people, but it was just like acquaintances. So it was just like a whole new world to me, but I made friends.

D: That’s very brave…

P7: Yeah, it was scary, but I have wonderful friends. I met a lot of people who were in the same position as me. My roommate this year, she didn’t really know anybody coming
here. Her and I have become best friends and have kind of taken each other under our wings.
Interview 8

D: Let’s start by you telling me about you decision to go to college.

P8: My decision to go to college revolved around either go to college or get a job with benefits. It just came down to that. My parents wouldn’t have it any other way with me. That’s what they said; it’s either go to college or get a job with benefits. That’s it. They were very straightforward with me.

D: So I’m assuming your parents influenced your decision to come to college. Is there anything else or anyone else?

P8: Like going through my whole life—I’m the youngest of three children…I hate to say this about my family, but aside from them being who they are, they are pretty much my decoys in life. Like my brother and sister—my brother went straight into the workforce. Well, he took two semesters of college and then decided to go into the workforce. It wasn’t for him. He’s a machinist’s apprentice now and he makes pretty decent money. My sister was very motivated, but she also went into the workforce. She made a couple of bad decisions and now she works a white collar job I guess you could say. She’s still living with my mother at the moment. She came back to live with us because, like I said, a couple of bad decisions. And she’s not a bad person for it. So I guess just seeing my brother and sister take the route that they went with. My mom and dad both saved up money for them—and they saved up money for me too—and they spent their money a certain way. I decided that I was going to go to college and all of the money that my mom and dad set aside for me—that was going to go toward my college. I mean it’s not going to pay for all of it, but that’s where the majority of it is. I think it’s like 10,000 dollars that they saved up for all of us. And that’s from hard work. That’s not from just sitting around and calculating numbers like some people do. My mom and dad worked hard.

D: What were your expectations of college?

P8: I guess what I could say is that one of my motivating factors was that I wanted to get out of my town. I hated my town. To this day I still do not enjoy going back home. So I guess my expectations of college were just of a completely different world from my town. And it’s true, but it’s kind of a positive and negative factor. My expectations were that I was going to be in a place where I was going to meet a lot of people who were different from me and a lot of people who were the same as me. Well I met a lot of people who were different from me, but not so much the same—well not as many as I had wanted to. I met some people who were in the same situation.

D: So was that part of your expectations as well, in terms of meeting new people?

P8: Yeah, meeting new people and basically getting a job, or getting the career that I wanted.
D: What are your educational and career goals?

P8: My education and career goals—that’s so ironic that you asked me that today. I’m switching my sequence or major. At first it was video production. I wanted to get into a field that I knew I would enjoy. I took a vocational in high school. I’m getting a bachelor’s degree in t-com still, but I switched to audio production today because I’m more interested in music. It’s mainly to fuel that fire that I have, like that passion that I have.

D: Do you play an instrument?

P8: Yeah, I play guitar, bass, drums, a little bit of harmonica.

D: What has shaped your goals—your desire to go into audio production?

P8: I guess at this moment in time, two things. Growing up my brother and sister played sports. They never had much of a motivation in one thing. Like my brother, he was really smart, but he never had any motivation to anything aside from just going to school. Then he just eventually becoming a machinist. He doesn’t have too many aspirations. That’s just how he is. He’s not lazy. He’s just that kind of person. My sister had the same kind of problem, but she was a little bit more motivated. She actually went to college and got her business degree and stuff. I guess what shaped my goals is that—I was growing up and when I was really young my parents always emphasized on just do what you want to do. So ever since I was really young I wanted to play the guitar. I’ve always wanted to play the drums. When I was a kid I always knew what I wanted to do, unlike other kids—I knew for a fact what I wanted to do when I grew up. I guess that’s one thing that shaped my goals. I was in theater. I was in tele-productions. I did all that stuff in high school. I guess the other one that really shaped my goal was now—I did an internship and documentary over the summer and it really showed me where my true passion led. It really is that. I guess those are the two things that really shaped my goals at this moment in time. They could change.

D: Who would you say has had the greatest impact on who you have become and why?

P8: My mother for sure. My father is a good father. I love my dad, but he being the type of person he is and we being the type of children we are, we never communicated. So my mom was always there to talk to us and give us advice, and to comfort us. You know my mom is definitely the person in my life who has brought me down this path. She was very strong willed. She’s crazy, but she’s…she’s very straightforward. She was the one who said job or college, that’s it. You are either finding a job or we’re sending you to college. That’s my mother, definitely.

D: I don’t want to make any assumptions or anything. What would you say your family’s beliefs about education are?
P8: With them—they both came here [to Athens]. I don’t know, my dad came here in the sixties. My parents are old, I want to stress that. So they don’t know a lot about college, they don’t know a lot about anything, they don’t know a lot about college period. I guess their belief in education is that you have to get it because they only have a third and fifth grade education. My mom still says to me to this day, “You don’t want to push a dumpster the rest of your life—go to college or get a good job.” That’s what their belief about education is. Even though they said you can choose a job with benefits—with me especially it was like go to college. Go to college. Trust me, just go. See if it’s good for you. So their beliefs are very pro-education.

D: What would you say motivates you?

P8: Fear.

D: Fear? Tell me a little about that.

P8: I can say that growing up in a first generation atmosphere going to college—they put a lot on you, like your whole family. It’s not just your parents—like I have a lot of aunts and uncles they are very, “do this, do this, this is what you need to do.” They always give you that scenario of, “you could end up like this. You could end up doing general labor, general maintenance, mechanics, or machinist.” They always put those kinds of stipulations in front of you. So I hate to say this, but it’s kind of fear. But it really works because they show you what it’s like to work hard jobs.

D: Can you describe for me a time when you felt supported?

P8: Does this have to be within family or just anytime?

D: Whatever you would like to share.

P8: When I was in high school—the first couple years of high school—I was a real rambunctious kid. It was around the time of my parents’ divorce. I wasn’t a bad kid because of my mom. I knew how much trouble we went through for my mom and me in the divorce so I didn’t do bad things. I was very against kids doing stupid things because I saw a lot of that with divorce. I had a lot of friends that went through it. I guess the one time I felt supported is when I joined the speech team and theater—and the theater coach and the speech coach were like, “do this, this is something that you are good at. Express yourself.” They showed me an outlet that I knew about and was always interested in, but this time I could actually partake in it. I can say that it really just comes to down to speech too, because my speech coach was very close to me. She never had a son so she always looked at me like her son. She was always like, “you can do this. You have the strength to do this. You have the strength to become a better actor, a better competitor.” I guess that’s the one time looking back in my life that I was really, really supported. Because we worked together on a lot of things, me and my speech coach. I ended up
winning States. So it was a lot of work, but my speech coach is the one person in high school that if I didn’t have her around I don’t know if I would have such a decent outlook on life as I do now. I have at least somewhat of an optimistic outlook when it comes to doing what you want to do.

D: How do you think your experience in college as a first generation college student may differ from a student whose parents went to college and got a degree?

P8: Going to OU and just OU…

D: Is this the only school you’ve ever attended?

P8: Yeah, this is the only college I have ever attended. I guess even coming from where I come from in the state a lot of kids don’t go to college. It’s not like a bad area, they just don’t. I could go in to a whole political rant about that. I’m from Massillon, Ohio. I could go into a whole another forty-five minute rant about that. But I’ll spare you that and I’ll just say that the way it differs—everything, it seems sometimes. It’s really hard to take in. One of the reasons that I’ve become really overwhelmed, especially in my major, is that a lot of the kids in my major— they have these privileges that they have that you don’t have—they excel more, more than you can. I guess this is not really a pity party because I’m doing what I can, but it’s really hard for me to see kids who have parents as alumni. You see them bringing their parents here and they understand what college is, they understand what it’s about, they understand what you do at college, they understand the times of college. It’s just that whole part alone is really hard if you have parents who haven’t been through that—especially foreign parents because they don’t understand this sort of thing. I can’t bring my mom and dad here for parents’ weekend, nor can I bring my mom here for mom’s weekend because it’s not something that they would understand—it’s not something that they would enjoy. It’s tough. Another thing that differs is that you grew up in a completely different environment. And this has a lot to do with where I grew up, too. Where I grew up there is a big tradition in football. Everyone’s parents are involved with football, or are involved with the high school program. You also feel kind of left out from that because your parents came here in the 70s and 60s. They just started living here. Before that you really don’t know too much about them. You don’t know where your roots are. It differs a lot. I don’t try to show it to people as much because, in my opinion, it’s really sad. It differs. There are a lot of differences there.

D: So what would you say has been your greatest challenge?

P8: I can’t pinpoint it. I mean the greatest challenge for me is trying to—even though I have had a good outlook—now that I’ve decided to switch majors, and even before that, trying to see how many kids are exposed to certain things that you’re not exposed to, because of how much money you have or the type of parents that you have. It’s mainly just adapting to the college life and what that’s all about. Kids have trouble doing that.
period sometimes; and trying to do that when you are set with the different ideals or environment then most people are used to- it sucks.

D: Can you give me an example of things that other students may have done that you are aware of—maybe that you weren’t able to participate in or something like that?

P8: I can’t say not able to participate in it, but I can say that there are a lot of kids who have certain equipment for t-com that they are able to get. Like, I know a kid that works for Mac. Or they know someone. Or their dad or mom knows someone who works for Mac. Like my parents don’t have those types of connections. I know kids who—especially with having parents who went to college—who have said, “my dad told me this, my mom told me this about college”. They have access to information that I’ve never had. I’ve had to learn everything by trial and error coming to college. It makes you stronger, but it’s usually just access to information that is really hard for me. That’s what’s been the biggest challenge and something that a lot of the other kids have been exposed to and I haven’t.

D: Now, what year are you?

P8: I’m a junior.

D: Has there been any change over the years? Do you think that maybe the challenges were greater your freshman year? Has there been any change?

P8: I talk to professors and I would get as much information about what I needed to do in college because I was undecided my first year. Everything has been a brick wall after brick wall. It’s like “boom” stop, but you have to find some way over it. I wanted to go into broadcast journalism, but I didn’t know about the prestigious Scripps school and how strict they were. Well, I didn’t get in to it so I declared undecided then had to figure out how to get into t-com. I get in to t-com and I have a horrible advisor who didn’t even contact me within the first quarter. I sent him e-mails and he never contacted me back. Then I found out that you have to go through a certain sequence of classes or you have to wait until the next year. So I didn’t get in to any classes until the end of my sophomore year. And then I take an internship and decide I don’t really like it and am switching majors my junior year. Now I can say that I’m on my toes. Coming out of high school you don’t know what to expect. Now being my junior year I can’t let anything fall behind any more. I guess that’s kind of an interesting situation.

D: On a scale of one to five, with one being least likely and five being definitely, how likely would you say you are to complete you bachelor’s degree?

P8: Bachelor’s degree? Or career after that?

D: This is just completion of your undergraduate degree.
P8: The way things are going I would say a four.

D: Four would be most likely.

P8: Yeah, definitely. My mom has been having a lot of problems—I guess I should start out. My mom has been having a lot of medical problems and she’s definitely the one who helps me out a lot.

D: You mean financially?

P8: My mom works her ass off. I can’t put it any other way. A couple months ago she fell at work and she broke her arm. She works with high powered hoses in sanitation so she almost got killed by a hose. Then after that she just had a slew of medical mishaps. At one point they thought she might have to have back surgery for the third time. So going the way things are going I’m going to give it a four. I don’t want to give it a three. I know how much they stress—both my parents—college that is I’m going to have to go on loans then that’s the way I’m going to have to go. My mom doesn’t want to pay like a $100,000 dollars in loans, but I also don’t want my mom to die or end up paralyzed because of me—and she doesn’t either. I mean she loves her kids, but she wants to walk. So even if that happens, my parents being smart parents have really good credit. They are really knowledgeable* with that type of thing. If I’m going to have to go out on loans, I’ll go out on loans. I’d give it a four, definitely.

D: How do you pay for your education now?

P8: It’s a mix of financial aid money, money from my mom and dad, and some really good benefits from the residence life staff.

D: So you work with residence life?

P8: Yeah, and I have a bobcat award. I have a nice bobcat award.

D: Great. On a scale of one to five using the same scale how would you rate your belief in your ability to accomplish whatever tasks or goals you set for yourself?

P8: I’m going to have to give it a two.

D: Ok, two being little belief.

P8: Yeah. I still have belief at this moment, but I’m going to say the reason why at this moment—if you would have asked me this sixth months ago it would have been a five—now it’s a two because I don’t really know where I’m headed at this moment. I might be heading into a field where I’m not going to find a job—you know what I mean? If it
comes down to getting through college I’m pretty sure—yes, I’m going to get through college, I wouldn’t let myself do that. But getting out of college and getting into what I want to is a new thing for me. I’m starting to figure that out now. Even at my junior year.

D: What about in general? General goals that you set for yourself, how capable of these..

P8: Do you mean in general, like…

D: Overall.

P8: Overall in my life? I’d probably be a little more optimistic. I’d probably give that a four because even though there might not be any hope at this moment for me career wise at the moment, I do believe that I will get a job somehow. I will get out on my own. I will be able to still have the hobbies that I have—pursue music. Nowadays with digital recording you can really do anything now. But I think in general getting out and being a citizen of the United States and pursuing the main goals that I have, which is getting out of Ohio. I think it’s pretty optimistic.

D: How would you define success?

P8: Man…

D: Is that a tough question?

P8: I’ve heard that one a lot. I’ve been through enough leadership programming and UC classes ________. I think for me success is—as cheesy as this may sound—it’s what you make it, but at the same time it’s doing what you love. Those are the two things that really shape success. If you are not doing something you enjoy then you are not going to be happy. And if you don’t put anything out there to enjoy then you aren’t going to enjoy anything at all. I guess those are the two things that kind of shape it for me.

D: Now do you think that your definition of success is the same as your parents’?

P8: Not at all. It’s totally different. For them it’s getting a job. Their success—that’s where it is, it’s getting a career. It’s being able to have what they weren’t able to have. If you sat them down right here that’s what they would tell you, I know it. I’m at college for one reason and it has a lot do to with that finding a job category. So I’m pretty sure that’s what it would be.

D: Based on your definition of success, how successful would you say you have been here at OU?

P8: At OU? Moderate, definitely not as much as I would want to be.
D: Ok, tell me a little about that…

P8: I look at college as a time when you can set personal goals for yourself that you can never do at any other time in your life. College is a time when you have the ability—I mean, you’re living in a residence hall. You have, in a way, no responsibilities—aside from going to class and learning what you need to know. Later on, junior and senior year, that obviously changes, but for the most part…I still live in the residence halls, I’m an RA. I have my responsibilities with that and my classes, but I also have enough time to do things—whether it be extra-curricular activities or whatever. I’ve been successful in the fact that I’ve met a lot of people, I’ve held a pretty decent GPA, I’ve done things toward my original major that I had, and I plan on doing way more things toward the major that I’m switching to. But there’s still those things—you see the partying aspect of OU and the having fun aspect, the staying up until ridiculous hours aspect. I mean I’ve went out, I’ve had fun, but I’ve never been able to have the no-responsibilities fun that some people have been able to have. At the same time, it’s like, that doesn’t really matter as much to me as it does to some students. I guess that’s why I only feel moderately successful. I know that sounds cheesy, but you are supposed to have fun in college. I’ve had a lot of fun, but not the typical fun. With me turning 21 soon, I hope I can at least enjoy the bar scene for a little bit—just do some of that. Not get crazy, but just be able to go out and experience things that some kids are able to experience and are willing to experience early on before they are 21. I’m just a little more patient. That really sounds bad with the whole moderately successful, but it’s not successful so much as it’s being able to enjoy college. Because everything else I have been pretty successful at. Like I said, I’ve gotten good grades. I’ve gotten to experience a lot. I’ve played shows. I’m really into music so that’s where I belong. I’ve written my own songs and I have performed them. I have my own band. I have a great group of friends who I just love, and they love me. Those types of things I have been lucky to find. It’s really all that’s left is just the typical part of college. It’s kind of a weird answer to say for success, but really I’ve done a lot of things.

D: What three things would you say have impacted your belief in yourself and you capabilities and abilities to accomplish your goals?

P8: In a negative or positive way?

D: Any way…

P8: My parents’ divorce, for sure. That has impacted me in so many ways—in positive and negative ways. I guess in a positive way…Of course that was around the time that…My parents’ divorce, I had a lot of friends whose parents divorced when they were young. My parents divorced when I was fourteen. I mean that is young. You’re hitting high school. That is like the center of insecurity. I mean from twelve to eighteen, those years for everyone, that’s growing up and trying to figure out who you are, in a way. Them getting a divorce then—I lived with my sister for five months. I lived with my
uncle for five months. Just straight ten months of confusion and what-not. I guess it’s impacted me for the most part in the better. My parents, they are still friends. It’s actually helped their marriage. They agree more now. They don’t have as many fights when they do talk to each other. They don’t fight at all now, really. It’s really funny. They always go to the store together still. It’s like, “you guys are divorced, come on.” But the way that’s impacted me—I knew for a fact when my mom said that dad was going to divorce her that I was going to experience something that I never thought I was going to experience. Even at that age, I knew my parents and how bad they were. It really helped me to just understand the cynicism of life—like things go bad. No matter how mad you are going to get, they go bad. And even though I still get mad sometimes, a lot of the time, and get annoyed I know better than to go out and do drugs. I know better than to go out and drink, kids that cut themselves and do really messed up things. I was that rare percentage of children whose parents were divorced that actually got better after the divorce because it made me realize that there are better things that come out of bad things. And then I guess the really bad side of divorce is that I went through a period when I had really bad self-esteem. I had no confidence in myself. It was really weird. I didn’t go out and do the typical things, but I had a really bad emotional hit after my parents’ divorce, as most kids do. I wasn’t able to focus as much. Still to this day…I won the eight grade spelling bee then my parents divorced and I couldn’t spell anything. I don’t know what happened, but people don’t understand the emotional impact of a divorce—and a working class divorce on top of that. It’s tough. I was one of the lucky ones. My uncle’s a contractor—my mom’s brother—and he built us a house with no paying for labor. When I say we were lucky, we were really lucky. It was a really tough time for me. I guess that’s the one thing in my life that has really impacted me. I guess the other thing that I can add…this is another thing…that was a time when I was, not only was I most insecure, but right after my parents divorce—that was the time that I started getting interested in underground music—preferably punk rock. A lot of that influence, a lot of the words, a lot of the lyrics that they had, I could just relate to at that time. To this day I still have this bond with punk music. I know that’s really off—topic, but that’s one of the things that has impacted me for the better. It made me just about as smart as the divorce made me. It made me happy.

D: So you are saying that the two things that impacted you are the divorce and then punk music?

P8: Yeah. I know that’s really weird. Those are usually the two things that cause a kid to go right down the bad trail in life.

D: But they had a positive effect on you.

P8: Yeah. I listen to a lot more music now, but still whenever I see kids who go through divorces, or I see people whose little brother and they are interested in that kind of music. I can’t help myself but to just sit down and talk to them about it. Even though that’s weird because I’m twenty and this is some kid’s little brother, but I still have that weird
youth connection. Like I know what you are going through, I know what you’re saying. So that has definitely caused me to be a more understanding person—toward people who go through things, what I went through. That’s two things that impacted me the most in my life.

D: Well that pretty much sums up all the questions that I had for you. Now I would like to offer you the opportunity to share anything else you would want to share with me about your experiences?

P8: The one thing I can say is that I know I already said this, but I think coming from…I think about the family I come from. First of all I come from a foreign family who’s been through divorce.

D: Where’s your family from?

P8: Italy. Just growing up in that situation and going to college, especially at OU that doesn’t have the diversity that some campuses do. A lot of the kids here are straight, white class, middle class white kids. I don’t like stereotyping it, but that’s how it is. I may be a white kid, but people don’t like to look at me as an Italian. I’m a full, 100 percent, Italian. To someone else that might just be ok, whatever. People don’t understand that. Especially when your parents have only taken fifth and sixth grade classes. They can’t even do a checkbook. I have to help my parents with my checkbook. It’s really hard with first generation college students. I just don’t think people realize how hard it is. I think colleges should be a little more sympathetic—more than they already are. They do have these UC classes, but they could do so much more.

D: I know I said I didn’t have any more questions, but this is very interesting. What would you suggest or what do you think they are missing?

P8: What do I think they are missing? First off, the financial aid department here is horrible. They are just like oh, you can’t pay tuition? Just go to fastweb and try to apply for one of these national scholarships that 10,000 other people apply for. If my parents…for anyone who is a first year college students and whose parents don’t understand it—you have to go through the financial aid process yourself, and it’s a pain in the ass. Especially when your parents don’t even have the numbers to give you for how much they make. You have to go to your tax lady and you have to talk to your tax lady about it. She has to show you how to do your FAFSA. You know what I mean? The services with getting money…because I would assume that most first year students have trouble getting funding** for college. That just only makes sense. I mean there are rarities, but I just think that…I’ve talked to other kids at other schools about their financial aid department. You know, they have a financial advisor, they have someone there who looks at their record and looks at who they are and says, well, you can do this, this, or this. I can help you with this. I can write you a recommendation for this. Kids tell me that. And then here…I’ve talked to some of the upper advisors and it’s like well you
just have to go to fastweb. And if you want a loan, here’s a list of eight banks who will
give you 8 percent loans. There has to be other things. And this may just be a rant from
being from a working class, but from what I hear the IT department are taking computers
out of the halls, and OU is trying to attract more working class kids. Why would you do
something like that? I don’t have the money to go and get a computer. These are small
things, but one after another….these are just two examples of a lot of things that I went
through here with people and how the university treats its students. You just have to hold
some kids hands as much as you don’t want to you have to hold them. Because me, I
came out of high school not knowing what I was going to expect in college. I didn’t have
parents that went to college and I didn’t have any relatives who went away to college.
I’ve looked for the services and I’ve found some good ones, but there are many ways that
you have to sympathize with a kid. Who have to show a kid how to do a FAFSA, not say
“go do a FAFSA.” I had to get my tax lady to do it. I think they really don’t understand
how some kids have no clue what they are doing. Because of that, for me, I’m ending up
going to college for five years and had to switch my major. Without explaining things to
us…and there is a little bit a fault on my part, so I’m not completely blaming the
university, but they could have done a little better to help kids—especially in financial aid.

D: Is there anything else?

P8: Aside form those things—just like the little things that most working class people
have trouble with at college—it was really nothing else for me. I feel like I’m getting a
good education. I feel like a good education is what you make of it. I really would like to
see more diversity on the campus. I’m not talking just culture diversity; I’m talking class
diversity because out of being here for so many years now, it’s hard to find someone who
is in my position to talk to. Trust me, I can tell you the number of friends I have on
Facebook. It’s over 800. It’s hard to find kids who can relate to me who are from the
working class.
Interview 9

D: Let’s start by you telling me a little bit about your decision to go to college.

P9: I don’t think it was my decision. I look at it as a decision to be obedient or disobedient. I didn’t look at it as a decision. I looked at it as the next step. I didn’t look at it like am I going to work or am I going go to college. It was like the next thing. Actually, I don’t really want to work forty hours for the rest of my life. And if I do, I don’t want to have to look at it that way, as work. I worked at Target for two years, while I was in high school I was a waitress. I didn’t enjoy doing that stuff. Well sometimes I did, but I didn’t want to be doing it for the rest of my life. So I look at this as the next thing and I’m going to go ahead and do the next thing because I don’t want to be doing this for the rest of my life.

D: You mentioned you didn’t want to work as a waitress or work at Target for the rest of your life, but are there other things or people that influenced your decision to go to college outside of working as a waitress or working at Target or your mom? Is there anything else that influenced you decision?

P9: History. African American history. I kind of look at it as an obligation. You know, they fought for our rights to have jobs, to go to school and stuff like that that was important to them. When I watch the movies and stuff I feel obligated, privileged.

D: When you first entered college, what were your expectations?

P9: I guess I thought it was going to be more like high school. In high school, unfortunately, I took shortcuts and cheated myself sometimes by not studying. But somehow I managed to do good on tests and quizzes without turning in assignments here and there. SO when I came here I kinda did the same—well they didn’t require us to do much homework to turn in anyways. So as far as reading, I kinda figured I could just listen in class and that wasn’t so. I just didn’t know that it was going to be so difficult. I didn’t really know what to expect. Nobody before me had gone to college so I didn’t really have any expectations. I didn’t visit any colleges or anything.

D: Do you have any expectations now?

P9: I can’t really think of an example, but I know that when I have a conflict in the classroom I talk to my mom about it, and she says, “Well you’re supposed to go to the teacher, and you are supposed to say this because it is their job to teach you.” I just feel like the professors, they should be teaching. They should show up like we are responsible to show up. Just resources should be available and they are.

D: Can you give me a couple of examples? When you say resources, what do you mean?
P9: Like the career center, the tutoring center—stuff like that. Data…

D: Data? What data?

P9: You know, like how like you can go to the library and get magazines and you can go online and look up documents.

D: What are your educational and career goals?

P9: Right now my goal is to finish college. And afterwards it is my hope, it is my wish that I will be able to do something, that I can incorporate my degree into something I enjoy doing and can be successful in.

D: And what will your degrees be?

P9: Right now I’m majoring in audio production and minoring in business. But I think I want to switch that and make my major business and my minor audio production. I like music. It has always been a big influence on me. I listen to mostly R&B. That was kind of stress management for me. Whenever I was going through hard times I started writing poetry and the poetry turned into songs. So it was a positive way to handle my emotion. And then I was good at math so I figured I might as well put the two together.

D: Would you say that there is anything in particular that kind of shaped what your interests are, what your goals are?

P9: What do you mean?

D: Would you say that there is any _______ that caused you to have an interest in those particular areas?

P9: Well up until the third grade, a very young age, I grew up with my dad in the house. After that age, I was growing up without him in the house. He wasn’t a good dad so he made me mad. I felt like that toward him, but I knew I wasn’t supposed to feel that way. It was kinda hard to handle it. One of my first songs was about that. And I learned how to do different stuff, some of it just came.* Then the fact that I was good at math.

D: Who has had the greatest impact on who you have become and why?

P9: I would have to say God. That’s just because I believe if you put God first everything else will follow. But I believe the people he uses the most in my like are my mom and even though my dad wasn’t there I try to make it positive because he made me a stronger individual. I would say my sibling indirectly because they kind of keep me in line. I won’t do certain stuff because I know that they are watching. They just indirectly keep me in line. They don’t know it, but they do. And my grandma.
D: What are your family’s beliefs about education? How does your family feel about education? What are their thoughts?

P9: That if you don’t have an education you will limit your opportunities. And if you do go ahead and get an education then you have all of the opportunities in the world. It’s just how you do it.

D: What motivates you?

P9: I have strong conscience, but I only have that conscience because it was instilled in me. So when I go to class everyday I think about the people who came this way before me and made it possible. I think about my mom who’s been there and I don’t want to disappoint her. I think about where I’d like to be and what’s necessary to get there, or where I don’t want to be. And I just think about wanting to be happy and to be independent. You know not totally independent where no one can do anything for me, but where if I want to do things for myself then I can.

D: Can you describe for me a time when you felt supported?

P9: When I graduated high school and got ready to come to college, everybody in my church—they supported me. They gave me gifts, the gave me money, or just stuff that I was going to need here like body stuff, or towels, or things to put in my room. The people in my neighborhood did the same. The family did the same. Everybody realized it was a movement and they did something to make that happen. So I felt very supported then.

D: How do you think your experience as a first generation college student may be different from your peers who have parents who have went to college and earned their bachelor’s degree?

P9: Last year when I applied…I kind of felt cheated because when I went to do the FAFSA I didn’t have all the help. I feel that if I had had more help filling it out then I could have got more aid. I just went in to that kind of shaky. So I feel that people who have parents who have both of their parents have done it repeatedly then they are more prepared going into the FAFSA. They probably have a higher income so they aren’t as worried about finances. There was nothing else that I really felt disadvantaged about. Someone who is first generation might lack knowledge. Like I said before, people who’s parents went to college they’ve experienced the campus life so they know how to prepare the student. They’ve gone through the financial situation so they know how to prepare the student. They’ve been through that pressure so they can prepare them emotionally as well as physically. And I feel like they don’t have to do as much trial and error as someone who is first generation would because they can learn form other people’s mistakes. Do they take advantage of it all the time? I don’t know. But they have that option.
D: On a scale of one to five with one being least likely and five being definitely how likely are you to complete your undergraduate degree.

P9: Five.

D: Now thinking in general about your belief in yourself and your capabilities to accomplish goals that you set for yourself—how would you rate your belief in yourself to accomplish a particular task or goal?

P9: Well the hardest part is setting the goal. To set a goal I would say a three. But once I set a goal and I know what I’m going toward it’s a little easier and I would say a four.

D: How would you define success?

P9: I don’t know because somebody can be successful without an education. I would just say that it is to perform to your potential and help other people.

D: Now is that your definition or do you think that it’s your parents or someone else’s?

P9: It’s mine, but I don’t know if that’s as detailed as I would like it to be. But it’s to perform to your potential and to help other people. But just learn what you are capable of doing. Once you learn what you are capable of you can perform to your potential. Once you are in the process of succeeding you should help somebody else. I don’t think being rich is necessarily successful. I’d say you’ve succeeded in being rich, but it’s not holistic success.

D: How would your mom or you dad define success?

P9: I have no idea how my dad would define it.

D: How do you think your mom would define it?

P9: Well, my mom always tells me that we’re wealthy because we know God. So I think she would say something about having a strong relationship with God and letting him lead you down the right path.

D: Now using your definition of success, how would you describe your success here at OU?

P9: I’ve found my strengths. I don’t perform to my potential. Very rarely, the majority of the time I would say I don’t. It’s close, but it’s not the most potential all the time. I would say I do help people, especially if they come to me. I’m less likely to reach out to someone. I do reach out to people, but I can say that it is easier to help someone when
they come to you then to see that they are struggling and take the initiative to reach out and help them.

D: Can you tell me two to three things that have impacted your belief in your ability to accomplish the goals that you set for yourself?

P9: My strength in God, my strength in my family, and my strength in myself.
D: Those are my questions, but is there anything else that you would like to say about being a first generation college student or to expand on?

P9: Not that I can think of.
D: Could you please describe for me your decision to go to college.

P10: My decision?

D: Uh uh

P10: Well I just…I see my family, my real family, all of them is in jail, or you know down the street hustling, making about 15 cents, and I didn’t want to do that. I mean, I’m not the first to go to school but now I know what I want to be. I don’t know if that is relevant to the question.

D: How did you decide to come to college?

P10: How’d I Decide?

D: How did you decide to come to college?

P10: I just decided.

D: And did you have any help in that decision?

P10: About 50/50. Like, just like, my old school, I wanted to graduate, the graduation rate was…I wasn’t going to graduate.* Even though I had the worst grades, I just wanted to continue my education because I thought I had potential to be something.

D: So you went to another college before you came here?

P10: Yes ma’am, I went to a community college.

D: What things or people influenced your decision to come to college?

P10: To tell you the truth, football. I wanted to play football. I should have said that on the first question, but just football. That was my goal. That was my dream, you know, watching football on TV.

D: What were your expectations of college? When you first left for college what were your expectations? What did you think college was going to be like?

P10: I just thought it was going to be like another high school, I guess, but I didn’t take high school seriously. I did better at community college than I did at high school—probably because I knew teachers still.* But when I came here it was a different story. All the education I had growing up—like I didn’t learn to study or nothing. I had to find
ways of doing things, to reach my peak. But I thought college was just going to be like another high school. I thought it was going to be like high school but at the next level. D: So what do you expect out of college now?

P10: Hard work, expensive books. I mean, holler at your professors if you need too. I just never thought that it would take all this energy to try to learn something because I never did that in high school so that’s how I thought college was going to be.

D: What are your education or career goals? What do you want to do?

P10: Be a teacher.

D: Be a teacher? Is there a particular area?

P10: Probably teaching elementary and junior highs.

D: Wonderful. How did you come to this goal? What made you want to become a teacher?

P10: Because when I was growing up I was miseducated. And I told you about my troubles in the past so now I want to work hard in college so that I can get a job and the people that grow up in the ‘hood can get the education that I never had. To get them prepared and stuff…

D: Prepared for…

P10: College or high school. ‘Cause I remember the first high school I went to, it was just a walk in the park. Then I transferred to ______ high school, and they were like you should have learned this in such and such grade. I never learned this in such and such grade! When I connect the dots it makes me want to strive harder to learn and teach the kids the right stuff—what I was never taught. Make sure they don’t go through the same stuff that I went through.

D: Who has had the greatest impact on who you have become?

P10: A lot of people: my grandma, my step dad—working from job to job. My mom taking care of me, doing what she did. My step mom, too, because she came to Ohio from Vietnam and she told me she was walking to the grocery store in Lancaster. There’s no sidewalks or nothing and she was pushing the stroller to the grocery store. Just on her own. ________________________________. And my step family just sticking together. You know, family sticks together. My aunt, she always told me hard work pays off. It’s so crazy that I got this stuff. That I’m the first in college because I’m a knucklehead.
D: How does your family feel about education? What are their beliefs about school and about college?

P10: On my mom’s side they always stressed education, but they never did the proper things to make it work. They never punished me, never whooped me—none of that. When I look at life sometimes I wish I had some discipline growing up. They never did that, but that’s because ____________________________. My dad took it very seriously, but that was too late. I was fifteen, sixteen years old—you can’t straighten me out. Probably someone else, but not me, it was too late.

D: What did your dad say or do? How did you know that he took it very seriously?

P10: I remember playing football. I was JV. It was my first game. I told him I got an F on my progress report and he was like an F! ______________ football team.

D: Ok, so it was a stern support.

P10: They even sent home progress reports to my dad. I couldn’t catch them. In my first high school they gave them to us to take home and I would flush them down the toilet. But I remember—he took my PS2, my computer, my TV.

D: Your dad took that?

P10: All of that. All of the good stuff.

D: What would you say motivates you?

P10: Right now?

D: Yeah, what would you say motivates you?

P10: Well I’m older and I understand how much education is really important. And if you develop that desire to do something it’s going to show.*

D: Can you describe for me a time when you felt supported?

P10: Every time I go home with my mom. Every time I come back to Caveat* I feel supported.

D: How, why is that? What does your mom do to make you feel supported?

P10: Baby me. You know, cook for me. Stay in the house, that’s it. Because here I don’t have to stay at home, I’ve traveled here. I’ve been in Athens for this time period and I
think I’m going to Columbus then back to Athens, and I think I’m going to Youngstown for spring break. Then come back to Athens and then go to Lancaster with my step mom for the summer? It’s just too much driving. And I think that’s my fault too because I should just get my own place, but it’s too much money out here. Dorm rooms too stressful. The financial situation, somebody else probably do the same thing. They’re trying to find as much money as they can to find the best thing possible. D: How do you think your college experience is different from other students…

P10: Who were privileged?

D: Yeah, other students whose parents went to college and earned a degree?

P10: I could go days on that. Way different. Stressful—I mean these people are like I got an F? Well my mom’s paying for it anyway so I’ll just take it over. It’s different because they give their child money. Suppose my mom—she helped me out—but she don’t pay my school bills, she don’t pay my house bills. She pays my cell phone, but that’s it. As far as rent, I have to come up with that myself. She do what she can, but when it comes to privilege they get their dorms paid for, their tuition paid for…it’s crazy.

D: On a scale of one to five with one being least likely and five being definitely how likely are you to complete you undergraduate degree?

P10: I give it a five. Even if it takes thirty years, I’m going to do it. I don’t want to do it in that time, but that’s just how much I want to do it. That just shows that it’s something I’m willing to do.

D: In general when you think about your belief in your abilities to accomplish goals that you set for yourself, how would you rate that using the same scale?

P10: I’d say a three.

D: Ok, so a three would be some belief that you can accomplish goals that you set for yourself.

P10: Yeah, like starting this quarter I believe. I was in a slump lately. I’ve been having goals of you know getting good grades in summer class or last quarter, but I fell kind of short. Now I feel confident that I’m going to do really better, but I’m not going to be like I’m going to do it this quarter because that will make me fall short. So we’ll have to wait and see.

D: How would you define success?

P10: Being happy.
D: Is that your definition?

P10: That’s my definition. If you get the job you want—you’ve obviously been training, you’ve got the job you want. In four, five, six years you’ve got a house and a family. It’s got nothing to do with money because money don’t buy it. Just happiness.

D: So how would you describe your success at OU based on the definition you gave me of success?

P10: I’m just reaching my peak. I’m not happy…I’m 50/50 because I’m doing bad in school. I’m about to do what I can do as far as work wise and trying to study and stuff. But it’s still the same thing every quarter—I’ve got to learn. It is what it is and it’s 50/50 right now.

D: What two or three things have impacted your belief in yourself to accomplish your goals that you have set for yourself? What two or three things have affected your belief in your ability to accomplish a goal?

P10: Just positive feedback.

D: And who does that come from?

P10: My step dad, my mom, my friends at my old college, my employer’s wife, Ms. Jenkins—everybody.

D: Is there anything else that you think also affects this? Any other factors?

P10: The grades I get. Push harder for a better grade. Make less mistakes.

D: Is there anything else that you would like to add. Is there anything else about you experience as a first generation college student that maybe I didn’t touch that you would like to share?

P10: My perspective from a low-income standpoint sometimes I just wish I hit the lottery or something. It’s fun, but you pretty much go to college to meet new people and expand your education to a higher level. That’s about it. At the same time I don’t have the college life that other people have where they can go out any time they want to. They calling me are we going out tonight? And I’m like I can’t I have to work. It’s painful, but at the same time it’s fine.